

2001 SPRING FOOTBALL PREVIEW

Huskers Illustrated

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Volume 21, No. 4

APRIL 2001 • \$3.95

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April 15	Oklahoma State2 p.m.
April 21	Texas A&M2 p.m.
April 22	Texas A&M1 p.m.
April 24	Creighton7 p.m.
May 6	Iowa State3 p.m.

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March 9	Kansas State2 p.m.
March 10	Kansas State2 p.m.
March 11	Kansas State1 p.m.
March 23	Missouri	.....6:30 p.m.
March 24	Missouri	.....2 p.m.
March 25	Missouri	.....1 p.m.
March 28	Wisconsin-Milwaukee	1 p.m.
April 4	Creighton	.....6:30 p.m.
April 6	Texas	.....6:30 p.m.
April 7	Texas	.....2 p.m.
April 8	Texas	.....Noon
April 10	Southern Utah	....6:30 p.m.
April 11	Southern Utah	....1 p.m.
April 13	Baylor	.....6:30 p.m.
April 14	Baylor	.....2 p.m.
April 15	Baylor	.....1 p.m.
April 17	Texas-San Antonio	6:30 p.m.
April 18	Texas-San Antonio	..1 p.m.
April 24	Creighton	.....6:30 p.m.
May 4	Oklahoma State	....6:30 p.m.
May 5	Oklahoma State	....2 p.m.
May 6	Oklahoma State1 p.m.
May 8	Northern Iowa6:30 p.m.

Times may change due to weather.

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Another Game After All

Huskers ready to begin preparations for ambitious fall schedule



Brian Hill

FOURTEEN GAMES.

That's the long and winding road the Huskers will have to take to return to the top of the college football heap in 2001.

In our March issue, we reported that Nebraska had decided against adding a 12th game to its schedule. With a potential

some of them first-teamers and some of them are going to be guys that are going to be second-team type of guys that have relatively little experience," Solich said.

"The fact that we'll get another week of practice in gives us more practices to help bring those other players along. Only 15 practices in the spring doesn't allow you a lot of time to mature a player."

The Huskers were to open spring drills March 19, with the annual Red-White Spring Game scheduled for April 14.

Every spring is important, but this one seems especially so, as Nebraska must replace a number of key players on both sides of the ball.

To help you follow spring football and look ahead to next season, we have a 14-page package on the 2001 Huskers (starting on Page 12). Contributing editor Mike Babcock takes a look at some of the questions facing the Huskers and has a closer look at I-back heir apparent

Dahrran Diedrick. We also have a position-by-position breakdown, a look at the injury situation, a spring roster and more.

Just because it's time for spring football doesn't mean the weather has turned balmy in Nebraska. Ask the NU baseball team.

The Huskers got in just one game of their home-opening series with Kansas State. The remaining two games were cancelled because of cold, rain and snow.

After starting out 2-3, Nebraska won 11 straight games and was off to its best start since 1988. The Huskers, rated fourth in the preseason, moved back up to No. 5.

Our baseball coverage this month includes a feature story on All-American pitcher Shane Komine (Page 30) from Honolulu, Hawaii.

He's a junior, so I guess he's getting used to Nebraska springs. ■



Big 12 championship game and bowl game pushing that total to 14, NU officials said that enough was enough.

But never say never.

Nebraska will play host to Texas Christian on Aug. 25 in the Pigskin Classic. Yes, the same TCU that was on this year's schedule at one point before it backed out (see NU Notebook on Page 6).

The prospect of playing a preseason game at home was apparently too much to pass up. The money an extra home game generates was obviously a factor, but it will also give the Huskers two games before Notre Dame visits on Sept. 8.

The late addition gives Nebraska eight home dates on the 12-game schedule, but extending an already lengthy season was a significant consideration. "Certainly, if you have a few injuries, you can look back on it and say you wish you never played," Nebraska Coach Frank Solich said.

Then-quarterback Bobby Newcombe suffered a knee injury during the last preseason game in which Nebraska played — the Eddie Robinson Classic against Louisiana Tech in 1998.

Such risks can be offset by the experience young players gain.

"If you look at our football team, there will be a number of young guys with little experience lined up at a lot of key spots,

ON THE COVER

Nebraska designated-hitter/first baseman Matt Hopper takes a mighty cut. Hopper had 21 home runs last season as a freshman. Inset, I-back Dahrran Diedrick and the Huskers are set to start spring practice. Photos, design by Scott Bruhn

Got Something To Say?

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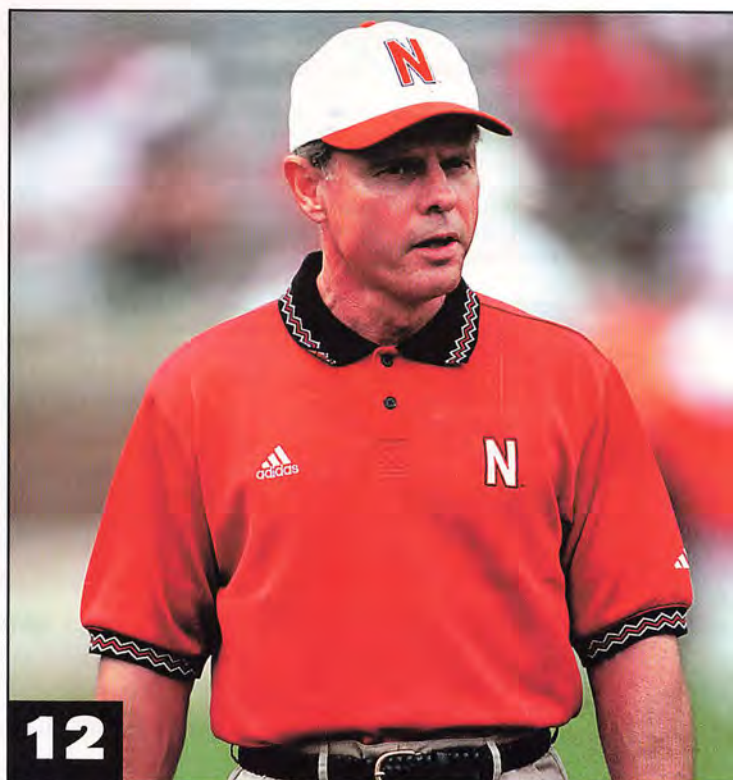
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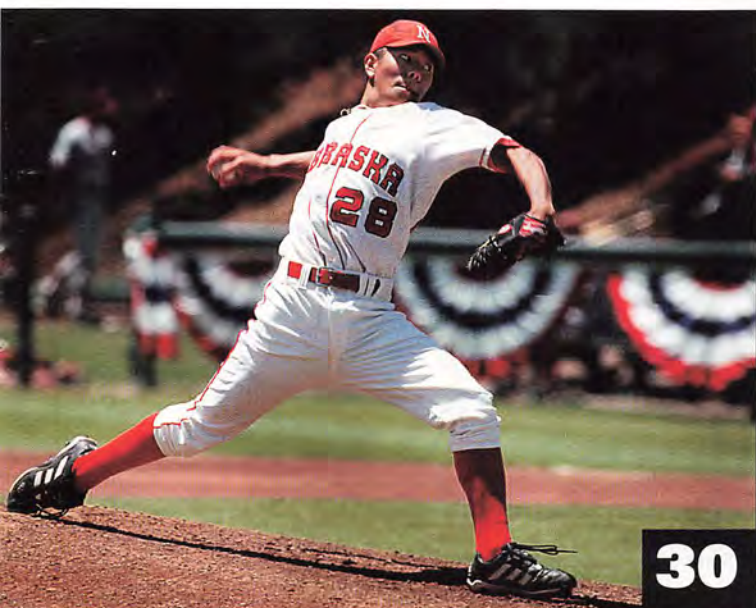
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A position-by-position look at the Huskers entering spring practice.

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12 He's Back for More

NU pitcher Shane Komine will have a tough time improving on his 2000 marks. *By Mike Babcock*

It's Huskers vs. Frogs in Pigskin

Yes, Nebraska was supposed to open the 2001 football season against Texas Christian. The schools had agreed to a three-game series for the 2000, 2001 and 2002 seasons.

Two games were scheduled to be played in Lincoln, the third at Fort Worth, Texas.

In 1997, however, TCU opted out of the contract, leaving Nebraska with three open dates. The Cornhuskers added San Jose State last season and Troy State this season and next.

Now they will play TCU, anyway, opening the 2001 season against the Horned Frogs in the Pigskin Classic — one of two preseason games sponsored by the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics — at Memorial Stadium on Aug. 25. Kickoff has been set for noon.

Nebraska was hoping the game could be played at night. But that decision was left to ABC, which is paying good money for the rights to televise the contest. Concessions must be made.

The announcement regarding what will be Nebraska's participation in a fifth preseason game came as a surprise. The week before, Coach Frank Solich had indicated that his fourth team wouldn't be playing in such a game. There had

2001 Schedule (Most Times TBA)	
Aug. 25	TCU, noon, ABC
Sept. 1	Troy State, 6 p.m.
Sept. 8	Notre Dame, 7 p.m., ABC
Sept. 15	Rice
Sept. 29	at Missouri
Oct. 6	Iowa State
Oct. 13	at Baylor, 6 p.m.
Oct. 20	Texas Tech
Oct. 27	Oklahoma
Nov. 3	at Kansas
Nov. 10	Kansas State
Nov. 23	at Colorado, ABC
Dec. 1	Big 12 Championship

been discussions with preseason games as well.

However, there was "a point in time where we were just lukewarm, at best, in terms of having an interest, such that I never even brought it up to the players," Solich said.

In early March, on the Wednesday of post-winter conditioning testing, Solich brought up the possibility of participating in the Pigskin Classic, catching the play-

ers by surprise.

"Last I heard, they (NU officials) really didn't want to do it at all," said tight end Tracey Wistrom.

The players were receptive. "Everybody was pretty positive about it," Wistrom said. "I can't really see a kid coming out, 'Well, I don't want to play an extra football game.' That's what you practice all season and all off-season for. Usually, you want to jump at that opportunity."

Solich said he could have predicted how the players would react.

"Generally speaking, they put on the gear not to practice; they put it on to play games," he said. "But yet, on the other side of it, they always want to know what's involved because they're intelligent and they need to be brought into the decision-making process on something like this."

"Nobody wants to show up with a football team that doesn't want to play."

Some tried to make that an issue after Nebraska accepted a bid to play Northwestern in the Alamo Bowl game last December, questioning whether the Cornhuskers would have sufficient motivation to play in a game in which, ostensibly, they had very little if anything to gain.

POST-WINTER CONDITIONING TEST SCORES IMPROVE DESPITE CHANGE IN APPROACH

Some players gained weight. Two-time all-conference tight end Tracey Wistrom, for example, weighed 239 pounds at the end of the Nebraska football team's winter conditioning program. That's the heaviest he's ever been. He weighed 227 when the six-week program began.

And some players lost weight. Dan Waldrop, a 6-foot-5 offensive tackle and sophomore-to-be who will be competing for a job on the right side this spring, dropped from 349 pounds to 332.

Defensive tackle Patrick Kabongo, who weighed 327 pounds when he arrived as a freshman two years ago, has trimmed down to 288. "So there were some changes that individuals needed to make," Boyd Epley, director of athletic performance, said after post-winter conditioning tests.

Whether gaining or losing weight, however, "we wanted to build a base," he said.

That's the purpose of the winter conditioning program, which was changed some this time around.

"Our focus wasn't so much on just being as strong as we can or as fast as we can, even though that's always part of the goal, always," said Epley. "We backed off a little bit, didn't run as much, toned down the drills, focused on getting healthy and improving our technique on the things we did do."

The change in approach was intended to reduce the number of "over-use" injuries, those related to repetitive, sport-specific drills. "We're back to general conditioning," Epley said.

Despite the change, test scores improved overall. "We did better this time around," said Epley. "It's kind of the same every year, really. You have some individuals who are disappointed, who didn't do quite what they wanted. You feel sorry that they weren't able to make the progress they wanted."

"And then you have other guys that improve in everything. It's like magic for them. It all comes together. One person peaks on the right day and the other one doesn't."



Jon Clanton

Nose tackle Jon Clanton again was among the former. The junior-to-be from Glendale, Ariz., scored far and away the highest on the performance index with 2,774 points.

Clanton is the fastest defensive tackle, running the 40-yard dash in 4.9 seconds, and "he has incredible agility," Epley said. "In the pre-test, he was the first athlete ever to score over 1,000 points."

Sixteen players scored more than 500 points on each of the performance tests.

There were: Demoiné Adams, Willie Amos, Dion Booker, Chad Buller, Tim Demerath, Gabe Fries, Jeff Hemje, T.J. Hollowell, Lannie Hopkins, Trevor Johnson, Dewayne Long, Jammal Lord, Jack O'Holleran, Jason Richenberger, Curt Tomasevich and Ben Zajicek. ■

POST-WINTER TESTING RESULTS

Performance Index Points		40-yard Dash Points	
Jon Clanton DL	2,774	Amos	733
Willie Amos DB	2,585	Jason Richenberger LB	704
T.J. Hollowell LB	2,563	Hopkins	694
10-yard Dash (seconds)		Pro Agility Run (seconds)	
Lannie Hopkins LB	1.53	Amos	3.85
Gabe Fries LB	1.56	Carl Scholting DB	3.89
DeWayne Long WR	1.56	Dion Booker DB	3.90
Joel Jackson DB	1.57	Pro Agility Run Points	
Jeff Hemje DB	1.57	Clanton	924
10-yard Dash Points		Justin Smith RE	777
Fries	733	Kyle Ringenberg RE	725
Casey Nelson DL	713	Vertical Jump (inches)	
Steve Kriewald FB	713	Tim Demerath DB	38
Clanton	694	Curt Tomasevich FB	37
40-yard Dash		Brandon Biodrowski DB	37.5
Amos	4.50	Vertical Jump Points	
Erwin Swiney DB	4.57	Demerath	714
Hopkins	4.57	Tomasevich	685
Keyuo Craver DB	4.60	Biodrowski	659
Pat Ricketts DB	4.60		

The Cornhuskers proved they were ready to play, Solich said.

That will be the case with the Pigskin Classic, according to quarterback Eric Crouch.

The game is "another chance to prove ourselves," he said.

Crouch is recovering from surgery on his right shoulder, and his progress was a significant factor in Solich's decision to play an additional game. "We really did not have a major interest in playing in a game and getting real serious about it until we got to figure out where Eric was," said Solich.

"I don't think you want to enter into an extra game, a preseason game, normally without an experienced quarterback if you're going to play a quality opponent."

Texas Christian finished last season with a 10-2 record, and the Horned Frogs were ranked No. 18 in the ESPN/USA Today coaches poll and No. 21 in the Associated Press media poll.

They have 10 returning starters, including quarterback Casey Printers, but running back LaDarian Tomlinson, who finished fourth in voting for the Heisman Trophy, is gone.

Coach Dennis Franchione, who turned the program around, also is gone. Franchione left for Alabama in early December, and Gary Patterson, his defensive coordinator, replaced him for the Mobile Alabama Bowl game against Southern Mississippi. The Horned Frogs lost, 28-21.

NIGHTY NIGHT

Nebraska will play at least two night games at home in 2001. The Cornhuskers have consecutive night games at Memorial Stadium following the noon-start Pigskin Classic on Aug. 25, against Troy State on Sept. 1 at 6 p.m. and Notre Dame on Sept. 8 at 7 p.m.

The Notre Dame game will be televised nationally by ABC. The Troy State game will be played at night, barring a change for television, in anticipation of cooler temperatures.

Nebraska's game at Baylor on Oct. 13 also is set for a 6 p.m. kickoff.

Times have not been set for the Cornhuskers' other eight regular-season games, which include a visit to Memorial Stadium by defending national champion Oklahoma on Oct. 27.

Ticket prices for the Notre Dame and Oklahoma games, as well as the Kansas State game at Memorial Stadium on Nov. 10, will be increased to \$50, \$12 more than the cost of the Pigskin Classic against TCU, the Troy State game and the other home games against Rice, Iowa State and Texas Tech.

In addition, Nebraska will charge fees for donor parking.

"Like everyone else, the athletic program is facing increasing expenses," Athletic Director Bill Byrne said in a release announcing the parking fees and increased ticket prices.

"We've already experienced a huge increase in utilities and travel, and we fully anticipate sizeable increases in housing and tuition fees in the upcoming year." ■

QUICK HITS

What's Happening In Nebraska Athletics?

TEAM PLAYER

No one can question Melissa Price's commitment to the Husker women's track and field team. Price, an All-American and the defending Big 12 indoor champion in the 20-pound weight throw, gave up a redshirt season to compete in the conference indoor meet at the Devaney Sports Center.



Melissa Price

Price not only competed, she won the event with a personal-best effort to help the Huskers stay close after the first day of competition. Then, with sprinter Lesley Owusu winning both the 200-meter and 400-meter dashes, Nebraska wrapped up its second consecutive Big 12 indoor title.

The Cornhusker men's team also won the conference indoor title, finishing well ahead of Texas A&M. Texas was a distant second in the women's competition.

"Helping out the team, that's more important than redshirting," Price told the Lincoln Journal Star after winning the 20-pound weight throw with a toss of 66 feet, 8 1/2 inches.

She sacrificed an indoor season by competing. Her decision to redshirt was based on the coaches' belief that the Husker women probably wouldn't be serious contenders for the conference title.

Sprinter Chris Chandler paced the Nebraska men's championship run, winning the 60 meters in 6.63 seconds and finishing second in the 200 meters, running the distance in 20.91 seconds.

SWIFT RECEIVER

The 6-foot-2, 190-pound Chandler, Nebraska's indoor record holder in the 60-meter and 200-meter dashes, has indicated he will join the football team when the outdoor track season is finished.

Even though he hasn't played football since he was a high school senior in Starke, Fla., Chandler expects to help the Cornhuskers. "It's going to be hard to stop me," he told the Lincoln Journal Star. "I've got speed, hands and rise. I bring another dimension to the team."

Finding wideouts is a priority during spring practice.



Chris Chandler

FULL CLASS

Coach Barry Collier apparently has filled his 2000-01 basketball recruiting class. Omaha and Lincoln newspapers reported that Collier received an oral commitment from 6-foot-9, 215-pound John Turek from Abraham Lincoln High School in Council Bluffs, Iowa, in early March.

Such a commitment is non-binding. The NCAA letter-of-intent signing period is in April.

Turek's high school coach is Bruce Chubick Sr., the father of former Cornhusker Bruce Chubick. Turek was recruiting by several Division I schools, among them Kansas, Iowa and Creighton.

He had made official recruiting visits to Central Michigan and Central Florida.

Nebraska signed four players to letters of intent during the NCAA's early-signing period in November: 6-2 Brennan Clemons from Olney, Ill., Central College; 6-11 Dan Heimos from Waterloo, Ill.; 6-4 Jake Muhlheisen from Lincoln, Neb.; and 6-5 Corey Simms from St. Louis.

The NCAA allows the signing of no more than five scholarship players in one year and a total of eight over a two-year period. The Cornhuskers already have two oral commitments for 2001-02: 6-9 Roy Enright and 6-4 Jason Dourisseau, both juniors at Omaha Burke High School.

In addition, Garth Glissman, a 6-5, 220-pound forward from Waverly, Neb., and Tony Wilbrand, a 6-10, 245-pound center from Alliance, Neb., have indicated they will walk on at Nebraska.

INDIVIDUAL CHAMPS

Jason Powell and Bryan Snyder won individual titles, but the Nebraska wrestling team finished fourth at the Big 12 championships in Stillwater, Okla., the first weekend in March.

Powell became the fifth freshman in Cornhusker history to win a conference title, defeating Matt Ridings of Oklahoma 5-1 at 125 pounds. A month earlier, Ridings had defeated Powell 8-7. Snyder won his third Big 12 title with a 9-5 victory against Iowa State's Cole Sanderson at 157 pounds.

Snyder is only the second Cornhusker to win three conference titles. Heavyweight Tolly Thompson, was the first (1995-97). Snyder is a junior and will have an opportunity to win a fourth next season.

Besides Powell and Snyder, Cornhuskers Todd Beckerman (133), Brad Vering (197), Tony Denke (165) and Ati Conner (174) qualified for the NCAA Championships at Iowa City, Iowa, March 15-17. ■

Interesting Question

If Brown can help at wide receiver, will he continue to be the place-kicker?



Mike BABCOCK

THE QUESTION IS HYPOTHETICAL for now. But if it were ever to be asked in earnest, Josh Brown would agonize over the answer. "That would really take a lot of thought," he said recently.

"I honestly can't answer that question because I don't know. You give it thought and you decide things in your head. But I don't know. I just can't answer the question."

Brown's potential quandary involves his position on the Nebraska football team.

The Cornhuskers' place-kicker the past two seasons will be getting a serious look at split end this spring. And if he shows he can help at wide receiver, he could end up doing both. The question is, would he be willing to sacrifice the place-kicking to concentrate on split end, if it came to that?

"I don't know," Brown said, as if repeating himself would somehow help him decide.

If the coaches were to ask him to give up kicking, "I mean, whether I could answer then, at that time, I don't know. That's a big part of my life. It's a very big chunk of me; it took a lot on my part."

If he were to agree, "that would be an unselfish act, a very unselfish act," he said.

That Brown agreed to join the wide receivers this spring is an indication of what he would do if he were asked to focus on that position to the exclusion of what he has worked so hard to do.

Depth at wide receiver is a significant concern going into the spring, with the departure of split ends Matt Davison and Tom Beveridge and wingback Bobby Newcombe. And the situation will be even worse if the NCAA doesn't grant John Gibson a sixth season of eligibility, as expected.

Brown worked with the wingbacks last spring. But it was more, "Let's see what he can do," he said. "Now, they're really looking. They need people who can catch the ball."

"They think I can do that, and they're definitely taking a stronger, closer look."

What they'll see is an outstanding athlete, something Coach Frank Solich emphasized when he recruited Brown from an eight-man program in tiny Foyil, Okla., in 1998.

Brown was a running back and safety in addition to kicking and punting, rushing for 1,891 yards and scoring 51 touchdowns in 13 games as a high school senior. He also was a two-time state high jump champion, with a career-best of 6-foot-8, and he ran the 100 meters in 10.74 seconds.

His focus on kicking has cost him a step of speed. He declined, with a good-natured laugh, to reveal his 40-yard dash time in post-winter conditioning testing to newspaper reporters.

His best was "slower than 4.6 (seconds)," is all he would say. As a freshman, "I was running in the high 4.5s, 4.6," he said. "I want to be running 4.6. It's definitely achievable."

He also needs to regain some of the explosiveness he had three years ago. His vertical jump was 35 inches then. He jumped only 33.5 inches in this year's post-winter conditioning testing.

"I've just got to squat (lift) harder and get stronger in my legs than I am right now," he said.

What complicates the situation is, even though he has been the place-kicker for two seasons, he isn't taking that job for granted this spring, not with Sandro DeAngelis coming off a redshirt.

DeAngelis, a scholarship recruit from Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada, is "going to give me a run," Brown said. "He's definitely going at it. He has really worked hard."

But Brown has worked hard, too, and "one thing I do have on him is experience, playing in game situations," said Brown. "Hopefully, that will benefit me come spring ball."

Brown was 5-of-10 on field goal attempts last season, including a game-winning 29-yarder as time ran out against Colorado. He also extended a string of successful extra-point kicks to 99.

But his kicking last season disappointed him, and maybe others, too. "I really think a lot of people doubt my capabilities," he said. "I think I lost confidence in myself, and I think some of the coaches kind of lost . . . I don't know if they would ever lose it. But they really thought about it."

"They were probably questioning my capabilities. That's where I'm coming in this spring, trying to gain everybody's confidence back. It can do nothing but help to have other people on my side."

The competition with DeAngelis poses another hypothetical question: Would Brown step aside from playing wide receiver in order to devote his attention to holding onto his place-kicking job?

"I don't know if I could step away," he said. "The way I approach things, coaches are the bosses. That's the way I've always been. If they wouldn't give me that option, I wouldn't take it."

"I can't exactly say, 'No, I don't want to do this. You're the coach. You see what's best for this team.' And if I can help this team in any way, then that's what I'll do. I mean, I always want to do that."

Ideally, from Brown's point of view, it won't come to that. He'll be able to help at wide receiver while holding off the challenge of DeAngelis. "I hope he does very well, for his sake," Brown said. "I hope he does extremely well. And if he can beat me out, then he deserves it."

"But it's not going to be something I'm going to let go."

There's nothing hypothetical about that. ■



Josh Brown has kicked 19 field goals in two seasons as a Husker.

Mike Babcock is a former sports columnist for the Lincoln Journal Star. He has covered Nebraska football for more than 20 years. Mike can be reached at mdb@inetnebr.com or P.O. Box 6782, Lincoln, NE 68506.

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Not Bad For A Catcher

Hard work helps Husker junior Spiehs make successful switch to mound



**Terry
DOUGLASS**

WHEN R.D. SPIEHS ARRIVED at Nebraska as a freshman in the fall of 1998, he fancied himself as a heavy-hitting catcher.

He had no reason to think otherwise. During his final two seasons of American Legion baseball, Spiehs hit nearly .400, hit a total of 35 home runs and had 163 RBI. In the summer of '98, he hit 18 home runs and helped the Grand Island Home Federal juniors win the Class A state Legion title.

Spiehs also had pedigree. His father, Randy Spiehs, was a catcher at Nebraska from 1969 through 1971.

For R.D. Spiehs, pitching was merely an afterthought. But 2 1/2 years and one big transition later, pitching has become the only thought for Spiehs.

"R.D. has come a long way since he arrived here as a pitcher-catcher type guy thinking he was going to catch," Nebraska pitching coach Rob Childress said. "He became a full-time pitcher here really out of necessity because we lacked some depth. I don't know what he thought of the move initially, but I know that R.D. took it a lot better than Randy did."

R.D. Spiehs admits that he was a little unsettled by the change. As a pitcher in Legion baseball, he was nearly unhittable but frequently struggled with his control, making him a suspect pitching prospect in his own mind.

"I wanted to hit home runs here instead of pitch," Spiehs said. "In Legion ball, I'd walk about a guy an inning, and here, you've got to throw strikes or you won't see the mound. Because of that, I was kind of hesitant at first, but the way the cards fell, it turned out to be a good situation."

"I don't know if I was against it, but it was definitely nothing that I'd ever planned for."

For a catcher, it turns out Spiehs isn't too bad of a pitcher. Last season, he posted an 8-2 record with a 3.23 ERA in 69 2/3 innings working primarily in long relief. Spiehs made significant progress from his freshman season in '99 when — relying primarily on his fastball — he was 5-1 with a 6.27 ERA in 56 innings.

"He's really turned the corner as a pitcher," Nebraska Coach Dave Van Horn said. "At first, I'm not sure that he felt it was the right move for him. I know he could still step in there and hit the ball a long ways, but it's tougher when you're hitting sliders every day."

"I know now that he knows this was the right move."

Childress said that once Spiehs fully bought into the idea of being a pitcher, it was like someone flipped on a switch.

"He made as much progress in a short period of time as anyone I've ever coached," Childress said. "We started teaching him the slider, and within a few days, he was hitting spots that would stand the hair up on the back of my head."

This season, Childress said Spiehs is capable of throwing four different pitches for strikes, while hitting between 88-92 mph on the radar gun with his fastball.

Even Spiehs has been a little surprised at the way he's developed on the mound.

"Once I sat down and concentrated only on pitching, things really improved," Spiehs said. "Just getting my control down and developing other pitches have been the big things. That just comes from repetition."

It's also come from a lot of hard work. Since the opening day of fall practice, Nebraska's coaching staff could see that Spiehs was one ultra-motivated individual.

"He showed up the first day this fall, and it was clear that he had some definite goals in mind," Childress said. "He's led by example, and it's been pretty evident that he was taking on a leadership role."

By the start of the season, it was also clear to Spiehs' teammates. The squad elected the Grand Island Senior High School graduate as one of its three captains for this season.

There's no question about where the spark that lit the fire under Spiehs came from. Even though he earned Nebraska's only win in last year's three-game NCAA Super Regional series at Stanford, Spiehs said he was determined to do his part to make sure the Cornhuskers don't come up short on their College World Series bid this year.

Spiehs and Nebraska missed their first-ever CWS berth by one win last year. The junior pitcher said that disappointment gave him plenty of extra incentive going into the summer Cape Cod League.

"I really tried to make myself better," Spiehs said. "It tried to get better stamina-wise, took care of my arm a little bit better and watched how many pitches I threw."

Spiehs' determination to improve carried over into the fall. While most of his teammates took the first week of classes off to get accustomed to their new schedules, Spiehs could be found putting in miles of roadwork and dropped down to 215 pounds on his 6-foot-3 frame.

"If he's not one of the hardest workers on the team, he's one of the top two or three," Van Horn said. "R.D. has grown up, and he really doesn't have any more of what you'd call baby fat or anything like that. I think he's dropped something like 15 pounds. He's really cut now."

As remarkable as it may have seemed to him 2 1/2 years ago, Spiehs doesn't think much about hitting home runs any more. That was reinforced last spring when NU starting catcher Justin Cowan went down with an injury, and Spiehs decided to take a few cuts in practice just in case the Huskers needed an emergency catcher.

"I jumped in the cage for about a week and started taking batting practice, and I have to tell you, the quickest thing to leave you is definitely your bat speed," Spiehs said, shaking his head. "I tried to take a couple of whacks, and it has dwindled . . . it's really dwindled." ■



R.D. Spiehs was 8-2, with a 3.23 ERA, as a sophomore.

It Happens Every Spring

Competition probably more fierce than any other time of the year



Curt McKEEVER

THE HEAD-TO-HEAD MEETING of the No. 1 units.

It's probably THE most-anticipated 10 minutes of football practice during the fall.

All group work stops and the entire team turns its attention to the 22 warriors. Offensive players not in the mix form a support group on one side, defensive players go to the other . . . and the barking back and forth is non-stop.

It's almost like an overtime session, where a player's focus is as obvious as a HuskerVision instant replay on every snap.

Now, imagine taking that kind of intensity to practice for 15 straight days.

In essence, that's what you get during spring practice, which might explain why it's a favorite time of year for a lot of people associated with Nebraska football.

"I enjoy spring ball. It's a very competitive time of year," Nebraska Coach Frank Solich said. "Everybody's running our offense, our defense. There are no scout teams."

For the players, it's a time to get noticed. And because of that, the competition during the spring is probably more fierce than any other time of year.

It's the time when coaches are lining up their chess pieces, and the players who want to be part of the arsenal come fall had better show up.

"It's not just a time to make your football team a little bit better, it's a time for players to move up the depth chart," Solich said. "It's a time for some of these guys to step forward, and they know it. So you do have that kind of pressure on a player."

But since spring allows players to have the most physical contact (with the exception of game days), it's a loveable kind of pressure.

Nebraska's spring session began on March 19 and concludes with the April 14 Red-White game.

As practice began, Solich must have secretly wondered whether 15 days would be enough time to take care of his to-do list.

"It doesn't sound like very much (time), in terms of bringing a lot of young guys along and getting a lot of things accomplished," Solich admitted. "You try to make the most out of those."

Solich and his staff are looking to replace seven offensive starters, five on defense, their punter and kickoff specialist.

The Huskers are most inexperienced on the right side of the offensive line, at receiver, fullback, I-back and middle linebacker. Those positions should bring out the best competitions.

But even players who are behind veteran starters, or those who have risen to No. 1 because of attrition, will get plenty of shots to establish themselves.

Among the returnees:

Quarterback Eric Crouch was restricted from throwing because of off-season surgery. The top returning right tackle (Chris Loos) and center (Jon Rutherford) were rehabbing knee injuries.

Fullback Judd Davies, who figures to take over for Willie Miller after averaging 10.3 yards per carry last season, was resting a bad back.

On defense, a player the coaches are counting on heavily, nose tackle Ryon Bingham, was easing his way back after missing last year with a foot injury. And starting right cornerback, DeJuan Groce, was recovering from shoulder surgery.

"You give everyone a chance and see how it comes out," Solich said.

Rest assured, the players behind the walking wounded will take their fortunate break and run with it.

Others will have the opportunity to benefit from position switches.

Some experiments are expected at rover and middle line-backer, where the Huskers lost Joe Walker and Carlos Polk. Last year's place-kicker, Josh Brown, was making a bid to become a receiver, where Matt Davison and Bobby Newcombe will be missed. And fullback Robin Miller was doing additional duty working with the I-backs who are vying to pick up where Dan Alexander and Correll Buckhalter left off.

Nebraska's playbook could also go through a drop-and-add of sorts during spring.

In the spring of 1992, Nebraska made the switch from a "50" front defense to a "4-3" alignment. This year, the tinkering won't be nearly as striking, but Solich is taking a look at a number of things, particularly on offense.

"I think this conference is so well-coached that if you just do the same thing over and over, people are going to have you defended pretty well," he said. "You better have something a little new. You want to operate efficiently with your base offense and defense, but you better have some things you're ready to change up a little so you have a surprise factor there."

"Within our (offensive) scheme of things, as many formations as we run, I think we can make some pretty dramatic changes."

Some of those come about after the coaches break down tape of every play run in games last season. For instance, all of the 41 pitch plays are put together and shown in succession to give the coaches a feel for what went right and what caused problems.

"If you're not satisfied with the play, you maybe consider throwing it out," Solich said. "You have to be careful of that, though. Just because something wasn't great one year doesn't mean it doesn't have a chance to be successful the next season. It depends on personnel and who's coming back."

"By the end of spring, we'll have a very good handle on what we're going to be running in the fall."

And the personnel who are going to be running it. ■



Frank Solich enters his fourth spring as head coach.

Curt McKeever is a sportswriter, covering the University of Nebraska for the Lincoln Journal Star. In addition to reporting on football he is the primary beat writer for the men's basketball and baseball teams.

Bac

No big changes planned

By Mike Babcock

Frank Solich's fourth Nebraska football team won't be attracting as much national attention as his third, which was preseason No. 1 in both major polls. And that's fine with Solich. After all, too much attention can become a distraction.

On the other hand, there can be an upside because of what it reflects. "I guess if you look at it, if you have people that feel you're pretty good, hopefully you're going to be pretty good," Solich said. "If no one thinks you're going to be pretty good, then you've probably got problems."

The national championship talk that went with the lofty preseason rankings in 2000 "probably didn't help. But I don't know that it hurt," said Solich. "We still got off to a good start. We still played really very good football at times during the early part of the season. There were just a couple of times where we did not get it done."

Those couple of times, of course, came in road losses against Oklahoma and Kansas State. As a result, the great expectations with which Nebraska's season began faded into final rankings of No. 7 in the ESPN/USA Today coaches poll and No. 8 in the Associated Press media poll. As a result, the expectations for this Cornhusker team are likely to be



Scott Bruhn

Frank Solich enters his fourth season as head coach with a 31-7 career mark. The Huskers finished seventh and eighth in the final rankings last season.

Back to Work



Senior-to-be quarterback Eric Crouch will probably miss all of spring practice after undergoing shoulder surgery in January. He will be ready when fall camp opens in August.

four-season stretch during the mid-1990s, "all of a sudden, that (anticipation) even increased," he said. "It probably increased in fan expectation, player expectation, coach expectation and media expectation."

In retrospect, the expectations for Nebraska last season might have been too high. "I felt good about our football team going into last year," said Solich. "But I was concerned about the top players we lost on the defensive side of the ball. And I think there was some good reason for concern, if you look at some of those players and the immediate impact they had in pro ball."

Those who cast their preseason No. 1 votes for Nebraska saw the Cornhuskers' experience on offense but tended to ignore their inexperience at key positions on defense.

The voters "saw the offensive people coming back and felt this was (going to be) a non-stop football team (offensively). But that's why they call it a team," Solich said.

"You have an offense, you have a defense and you have special teams. And very seldom are you going to be able to get it done if you are just great in one of those three areas. You'd better have another area that's working really, really well for you. You look at Oklahoma and Florida State, they both had great defenses. They both had special teams that could hurt you."

The Sooners beat the Seminoles in a national championship game dominated by defense, 13-2.

Nebraska might not have been that far behind. But "we probably were not a complete football team last year,

more reasonable.

That doesn't mean the players will be any less focused this spring. "The incentive in this program has always been there," Solich said. "When I say

always, I think Nebraska teams have always had great anticipation in stepping on the field."

And after the Cornhuskers won three national championships in a

SPRING NOTES

More About Spring Football

LIMITED ACTION?

Although quarterback Eric Crouch and offensive lineman Jon Rutherford are coming off surgeries, either or both could participate in spring practice in a limited way.

Crouch is recovering from shoulder surgery, Rutherford from knee surgery.

"We'll see how it works with Eric," Coach Frank Solich said. "Certainly he won't be able to throw but whether or not as spring goes on he'll be able to hand the ball off and run some options, those kind of things without contact, that might be possible. We'll need to check that out a little further."

Rutherford "might also be able to see some limited time as spring goes on."

HEAVY THUNDER, NOT

Thunder Collins, who had to watch from the sideline last spring, will be in the thick of things in competition at I-back, along with Dahrran Diedrick, DeAntae Grixby and Robin Miller.

The 6-foot-2 Collins is listed at 190 pounds on the spring roster, meaning he's not only the tallest of the I-backs but also the lightest. Diedrick is 220. Grixby is 200. Miller is 235.

"Typically, our running backs are a little heavier than that," Solich said of Collins. "You look at Thunder and he's probably not going to fill out to be the big back for you."

"But he'll put on a little bit more weight. He'll get stronger."

Collins joined the team in the fall, to much ballyhoo. But he played I-back in only three games, carrying 13 times for 77 yards. He also carried three times for 9 yards in the Alamo Bowl.

Despite being the fifth I-back on the depth chart, Collins maintained a positive attitude.

"I think he's come a long way in terms of understanding what the running back position is about here at Nebraska. And I think (he) has showed real progress at that as he's come through practices and gotten a chance in a few games to get some things done," said Solich.



Thunder Collins

BURST IS BACK, ALMOST

Grixby is ready to make a run at the starting job at I-back. The sophomore-to-be from Omaha Central appears to be healthy, after suffering a torn ACL in the spring of 1999.

He's been slow to regain the burst of speed that earned praise from former Cornhusker defensive coordinator Charlie McBride prior to the knee injury. But "I think he's got it back," said Solich.

"He certainly is very close to having it back. It took him a long time. It wasn't a deal where last season you just saw that all the time. But with the extra time now in the off-season and this spring, we expect it certainly next fall. You'll see the same burst that he had before his injury."

OH CAPTAIN, MY CAPTAIN

The Cornhuskers had six co-captains last season, the most in school history. Regardless of the number, however, their leadership must be replaced and spring practice, as well as the winter and summer conditioning programs, are times when leaders begin to emerge.

"I think that's one thing about the off-season, the way we operate, is that the leadership development is important, the chemistry that's developed within your team is important," Solich said. "So this is a very important time for us as we go through spring ball and then summer conditioning."

Three returning offensive starters are seniors: Crouch,

tackle Dave Volk and tight end Tracey Wistrom. Six returning defensive starters are seniors: tackles Jason Lohr and Jeremy Slechta, weakside linebacker Randy Stella, cornerbacks Keyuo Craver and Erwin Swiney and safety Dion Booker.

CONFERENCE CARRYOVER

Oklahoma's winning the national championship in 2000 is a reflection of the strength of the Big 12 Conference, which also had Kansas State as well as Nebraska in the nation's Top 10.

"It's becoming obvious, I think, not only to maybe the media and fans around the country but also to players and coaches that we're in a tremendous conference," said Solich. Consequently, "if you play great football right within our conference and get it done, then you're probably positioning yourself as well as anybody in the country to be part of the national championship scene."

Because of the strength of the conference, teams can't afford to sit pat during the spring.

"I think this conference is so well coached that if you just do the same thing over and over again, people are going to line up and they're going to have you defended pretty well," he said.

PASSING CONCERN

Even though Crouch can't resume throwing until the first of May, passing will be a point of emphasis during spring practice. The Cornhuskers completed 48.8 percent of their passes for 1,217 yards and 11 touchdowns with eight interceptions last season, for an efficiency rating of 120.07.

Crouch completed 75-of-156 with seven interceptions and the 11 touchdowns. Jammal Lord, a sophomore-to-be, threw only 16 passes, completing nine with one interception. Walk-on Joe Chrisman, a junior-to-be, didn't throw a pass last season after going 0-for-4 in 1999.

"We've certainly got to get where we throw the ball a little bit better, more consistently," Solich said. "We had times last year where we beat people with play-action passes and we threw the ball well enough to win games. And there were stretches that we threw it very well."

For example, Crouch completed 10-of-13 for 159 yards and a school-record-tying five touchdowns against Iowa. Wistrom caught three of the touchdown passes, also tying a record.

RETURN CONCERNS

Solich will be looking for replacements for kick returners Joe Walker and Bobby Newcombe this spring. Walker led the Cornhuskers in kickoff returns with 13. He averaged 19.8 yards per return. He also returned 16 punts, second behind Newcombe's 20 — with a 14.6-yards per return average.

Weakside linebacker Randy Stella led the team in kickoff returns in 1999, but he returned only two kickoffs, averaging 21.5 yards, last season. He could work his way back this spring.

Identifying kick returners is a "major concern," Solich said. "I think we have really good people within our program. We've just got to get them placed properly on that end of it."

"For instance, a guy like Keyuo Craver was not a (regular) punt return guy for us, (because) he (did) such a good job of blocking punts and blocking kicks. Well, he's also a great return guy."

In addition to Craver and Stella, wideout Ben Cornelson, rover Terrell Butler and cornerback DeJuan Groce are among the returning players who likely will get consideration as kick returners. Groce is recovering from shoulder surgery, however, and isn't able to participate in spring drills. ■



Keyuo Craver

and a lot of that came because of some of the players that we lost," said Solich.

Actually, the number of returning players with starting experience was slightly higher last season, with the majority on defense instead of on offense this time around. The Cornhuskers have only four starters returning on offense, one of whom, quarterback Eric Crouch, will be held out of spring practice, while nine starters at eight positions return on defense.

The only defensive positions that don't have someone with at least one start returning are rover, right rush end and middle linebacker. On offense, there are no starters returning at I-back, fullback, wingback, split end, center, right guard or right tackle. And a new punter also must be found.

Crouch's return is reason for optimism about the offense. And considering his experience, allowing his right shoulder to heal completely is more important than having him available in the spring. Plus, with him on the sideline, back-ups Jammal Lord and Joe Chrisman will have an opportunity to work with the top units, to take more snaps. "And with that, you'll bring your young quarterbacks along a lot better than what you would if Eric was taking those snaps," Solich said.

"We know exactly what Eric can do, and we've still got a lot of young players that are vying for positions there. This is going to give them a chance to develop. It will also give our first-team players a chance to have a couple of different quarterbacks running the first team and certainly develop some confidence . . . with those young quarterbacks."

Solich isn't planning to make dramatic changes on either side of the ball. The offensive and defensive schemes will remain basically the same.

Even though he's looking for improvement on defense, he doesn't plan to reshape the defensive philosophy, the way Tom Osborne, his predecessor, did in the early 1990s, going from a "50" to a "4-3" base alignment. Nevertheless, "we expect to be an improved defensive football team," he said. "We're going to need to be. And I think the same thing is true with our special teams.

"We weren't satisfied with what we got done with special teams

through last season. In order for us to vie for a championship of any sort, we need to show improvement in several areas."

Nebraska's offense is sufficiently complex that "I think within the scheme of things, as many formations as we've run, we can make some pretty dramatic changes within those formations," Solich said. "We're anxious to look at some new things and go with those. We will make some adjustments in terms of throwing some plays out, adding some different plays, maybe doing a little tinkering with some of our formations."

Although the Cornhuskers won't deal with the distractions that go with a potential preseason No. 1 ranking

this spring, "I think we have a chance to be a very good football team," said Solich.

"But I don't want to get too excited before we get out there and get something done. The past season has ended. This will be a new football team that we put on the field. There are some things, some issues we've got to resolve. There are areas that we've certainly got to get better at.

"I think we have the capability of getting better. We have the kind of athletes that it takes. I think we have excellent team speed. I think we'll be an aggressive, physical football team."

Spring practice will go a long way in determining whether he is right. ■

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Looking for

Every spring, there are a number of questions to be answered.

Here are just a few:

By Mike Babcock

Dan Alexander was Nebraska's No. 1 I-back last season, no question.

He started every game, though technically he was listed as the full-back in two of the starts at season's end, and led the team in carries, with 182, and rushing yards, with 1,154.

Still, he shared time at I-back with Correll Buckhalter, who averaged 7.1 yards on 108 carries. For all intents and purposes, he was part of an I-back tandem, two players with comparable ability.

The Cornhuskers might rely on such a tandem again this season, depending on what happens in the spring involving competition between Dahrran Diedrick, DeAntae Grixby, Thunder Collins and Robin Miller. Coach Frank Solich has said he'll "keep an open mind on it."

"If you have a guy that just steps forward and is clearly the guy at the position, out-distances everybody else, I think you go with him. If it's a situation where you have two guys that are really excellent players and there's not a major separation in them, then I think you use them both."

Alternating I-backs keeps both of them fresher than they would be otherwise. "You have a guy that's maybe not as beat down, wore down, at the end of the ball game," said Solich.

And you have guys that are "maybe not as beat down at the end of the season."

In that sense, at least, two are better than one.

Ahman Green was the last

Cornhusker I-back to assert himself, and remain healthy, getting 278 carries in 1997. He and quarterback Scott Frost each rushed for 1,000 yards.

Only eight other I-backs have had as many as 200 carries in the last 30 seasons. Lawrence Phillips holds the school record for carries in a season, with 286 (for 1,722 yards) in 1994. Mike Rozier carried 275 times when he set the school single-season rushing record (2,148 yards) in 1983.

Calvin Jones and Derek Brown were Nebraska's most productive I-back tandem in 1992, each gaining 1,000 yards — Jones ran for 1,210, Brown for 1,011 on 168 carries, one fewer than Jones.

Jones and Brown were known as the "We-backs" that season, a nickname that probably could have been used for Alexander and Buckhalter last season, and might be used again in 2001.

"But I will say this, if there is a major distinction and there is one guy that is a great back, and everybody else is not measuring up to that, he's going to get the work," Solich said.

The question of how the I-back situation will play out is bound to attract a lot of attention this spring. But there are other questions to be answered in the NCAA-allotted 15 practices.

And the next center of attention is?

Ten Cornhusker starters completed their eligibility in 2000. Such losses are to be expected.

But Nebraska was planning on Dominic Raiola's return until the jun-



ior center announced after the Alamo Bowl game that he would be leaving early by way of the NFL draft.

As a result, the on-field search for Raiola's replacement will begin in the spring, even though Jon Rutherford, one of the primary candidates, is

Answers



Jon Rutherford, the heir apparent to Dominic Raiola at center, is recovering from knee surgery.

has for us, being a multi-purpose guy," said Solich.

But "we'll certainly use Jon there (at center), and it could be that he'll be the guy."

Or it could be that Rutherford will be "a guy that's used some at center and still also some at the tackle spot. That's the good thing about a guy like Jon," Solich said. "He has so much experience at really all the positions in the offensive line that if an injury occurs, if you're not as strong as where you need to be at tackle, guard, center, whatever, he can fill that void for you."

In Rutherford's absence, juniors-to-be Matt Shook and John Garrison will be the only lettermen competing at center this spring. Garrison has been the deep snapper since his freshman year and will move back to center after being listed as a back-up at right guard for the Alamo Bowl game, while Shook is finally healthy after suffering a torn right ACL in the fall of his freshman year.

Nebraska has had a first-team all-conference center in nine of the past 10 seasons, including Raiola the past two. "I'd like to have Dominic plugged in at center, without having to worry about that," said offensive line coach Milt Tenopir. "But it's always fun to see which kids are going to step up."

"There will be some competitive spots. Kids tend to change when they have a chance to be No. 1s. Their tempo picks up. Their concentration increases when they have an opportunity to be that guy."

Red rover, red rover, can you send someone right over?

Walk-ons Aaron Terpening and Wes Woodward can count on having company in the competition to replace Joe Walker and Clint Finley at rover this spring. They're the only returning let-

termen listed at the position, and both earned their letters playing primarily on special teams.

In addition to Walker and Finley, Taylor Gehman, a scholarship rover from Omaha, is finished because of a neck injury, which occurred when he was a true freshman.

As a result, some players at other positions will be moving to rover. Josh Davis, an I-back last season, is among those, as are Terrell Butler from cornerback and Lannie Hopkins from weak-side linebacker.

"That's an important position on our defense, and right now there's nobody in there that has a real lock on the job. It's wide-open," said defensive coordinator Craig Bohl.

Defensive backs coach George Darlington will do a lot of evaluating during the spring, which "makes it more fun, although on the other hand, if you have a Mike Minter or a Mike Brown, that's not bad, either, where you, in essence, don't even bother to coach the one position," he said.

Terpening "was arguably our special teams player of the year, if you gave that kind of award," Darlington said. "But can he play there (rover)? We know he can tackle. We know he's tough. We know he has tremendous energy. Does he have the physical ability to play rover? Can he cover man-to-man against excellent receivers? We don't have any question about his effort. He's a 100-percenter."

Darlington will look at answering similar questions regarding other walk-ons, including Tim Demerath, who played on the scout team last season after transferring from Morningside.

"I don't know a whole lot about him as far as can he cover? I know he'll knock your brains out," said Darlington. "And I think he might be like a Troy Watchorn type of guy."

"When you have as many players as we do, you don't want to have a guy that can really help your football team get lost in the shuffle because you haven't accurately evaluated him."

recovering from knee surgery.

Rutherford, a senior-to-be from Midwest City, Okla., was the offensive line's super sub before suffering an ACL tear in the Kansas game, playing all of the interior positions. And "I think he'll continue to function like he



Jamie Burrow had 14 tackles, including one sack, as the backup to All-American Carlos Polk at middle linebacker.

The bottom line is, whoever they are and wherever they come from, a couple of rovers need to step up. "It's probably as important as any position on the defensive team," Solich said.

"It's a difficult position because you're asking a guy to cover wideouts but then you're asking them to tackle big, strong running backs coming up the middle. It's a unique person that can kind of do it all.

"So it will be very important for us to fill that spot."

The rover or strong safety has been compared to the quarterback on defense. And Mike Brown, who had an outstanding rookie season with the Chicago Bears, set the standard at Nebraska.

"You can see the difference he made," said Solich.

Who's the man in the middle now?

About the only media attention Jamie Burrow has attracted the last three seasons has come during the week the Cornhuskers played Iowa State. Burrow is from Ames, Iowa, after all.

This spring, however, he'll draw attention not because of his hometown or because his father Jimmy also

played at Nebraska but rather because he is the top candidate to replace Carlos Polk.

Jamie has played in every game the past two seasons as Polk's back-up. And when he has gotten his chances, particularly last season, "he played very, very well," Solich said.

"But that will be a battle this spring, to see exactly who's where there." Burrow was credited with 14 tackles, including three for losses, last season.

Tony Tata, a junior-to-be from Honolulu, Hawaii, is the only other letterman middle linebacker, and most of his playing time has come on special teams, meaning the position is another at which there probably will be some players moving from elsewhere, joining a group of walk-ons.

Mike Makris, Jason Long and Steve Safranek are among those walk-ons.

But Bohl, the linebackers coach, will wait until he has seen how Burrow and Tata respond before moving someone else into the middle. "I'm unsettled right now, just because Tony hasn't played a lot," said Bohl. "Jamie's played in several games. He played against Texas in the Big 12 championship game a couple of years ago, played well. We look for him to be really consistent, a good player."

Ira Cooper, a scholarship recruit from Omaha Westside High School who was redshirted last season, will start out the spring as a strongside linebacker, but he's big enough to play the middle. Cooper is "getting faster," Bohl said. "He plays pretty fast. But he probably needs to get a little faster."

Replacing Polk will be no small task. He earned first-team All-America honors from the Associated Press, leading the team in tackles with 90 to rank 14th on the Cornhuskers' career list.

You're new, aren't you?

More than three dozen redshirts, including 13 scholarship recruits, will have an opportunity to establish themselves on the depth chart this spring. Any one of them could emerge.

With Rutherford and offensive tackle Chris Loos, a sophomore-to-be, both sidelined by knee injuries, "that's going to open up some spots for some younger linemen," said Solich.

Mike Erickson, Jake Anderson, M.J. Flaum and Nick Povendo are among those coming off redshirts.

Also, "we'll be dealing with a lot of young players at the receiver spots, wideout spots," Solich said. Ben Zajicek, a scholarship recruit from Beatrice, Neb., will be among those in the mix at split end.

With Josh Brown a serious candidate for playing time at wideout in the fall, redshirted freshman Sandro DeAngelis will compete with Brown for the place-kicking job this spring.

"It'll be a battle for the place-kicking job, certainly," said Solich.

Even though he's not coming off a redshirt season, nose tackle Ryon Bingham is like a newcomer, having redshirted his first season at Nebraska and then being injured last season. Assuming he has recovered sufficiently from the foot injury, he could move up quickly on the depth chart.

Mitch Manstedt, also a defensive tackle, is among the many walk-ons that will be trying to establish themselves. Manstedt was invited to report with the scholarship freshmen last fall.

Butler, outside linebacker T.J. Hollowell, safety Willie Amos and rush end Bernard Thomas all played as true freshmen, with Hopkins, outside linebacker Jason Richenberger and cornerback Lornell McPherson among others who apparently got serious consideration to do so.

Even so, it's difficult to project which newcomers will play well enough in the spring to catch the eye of their position coach. The basis of spring practice "is to make sure that you get things lined up properly, give everybody a chance and see how it comes out in terms of your depth chart," said Solich. ■

Spring Football Preview

An Aching Back

**Fullback Davies
in resting mode;
4 other injured
Huskers should
be ready in fall**

Q uarterback Eric Crouch will miss spring football following shoulder surgery. So will cornerback Dejuan Groce. And Jon Rutherford is still recovering from knee surgery, as is Chris Loos.

Rutherford and Loos are offensive linemen.

All four should be ready to play in the fall, however. There's an element of certainty in their situations, a timetable for their rehabilitation and subsequent return to action.

That's not necessarily the case with Judd Davies. And that's cause for concern. As spring practice begins, Davies "will be in a resting mode, to try to get him to the point where he's pain-free and then from that point on, we hope to be able to get him involved again," Coach Frank Solich said.

"He's just going to be off of activity for a while."

The question is: How long is a while? With rest, Davies could participate in spring practice at some point, or he might not be able to join his teammates until summer conditioning.

In a worst-case scenario, he might not be able to resume football activity even then.

"Anything's possible," said Solich. "Certainly when you're dealing with back injuries, neck injuries, who knows? But it's not like this is the first time we've faced this. And we've had some success with the way we're dealing with Judd now. So we're hoping that will be the case."

Davies, the successor to Willie Miller at fullback, is bothered by a back problem similar to one that hampered tight end Jon Bowling. "We rested Jon just like we're going to do with Judd now," Solich said. "Jon was able to come off of that and not have any problems, play well."

"He's lifting in the weight room.



As a redshirt freshman, Judd Davies carried 18 times for 183 yards, including a 57-yard burst against Baylor.

He's getting stronger."

And he figures prominently in Nebraska's plans, following a sophomore season in which he played in every game, catching four passes for 46 yards and a touchdown against Missouri.

Davies figures even more prominently, not only because the Cornhuskers have considerably less experience at fullback but also because of what Davies showed in his first season.

He carried 18 times for 183 yards, a 10.2-yards-per-carry average, and one touchdown and caught three passes for 49 yards, in addition to establishing himself as an aggressive blocker.

Losing him "would change the picture in our backfield dramatically," said Solich.

In Davies' absence, walk-on Paul Kastl is the only fullback with experience, not counting Robin Miller, who apparently will focus on I-back after playing some fullback last season.

Kastl and Miller played in only 10

games between them, getting a combined 11 carries.

"I know that Robin really wants to be an I-back," Solich said. "He made the move and learned the fullback position last year for a couple of reasons. One was, if you know both positions, you're a more valuable guy for road trips. Plus, it appeared because of the depth of returning backs at the I-back spot that if Robin learned the fullback spot, he'd get more playing time this past season."

"But right now he's intent on wanting to get a good look at the I-back spot."

And the coaches are willing to accommodate him on that, assuming Davies' return.

Taylor Gehman and Shaun Coleman are two scholarship recruits who definitely won't be returning in the spring because of career-ending injuries. Both will continue in school on medical scholarships.

Gehman, a rover who played as a true freshman in 1999, suffered a neck injury five games into his first season, and the neck problem returned two games into last season.

Coleman, a middle linebacker, suffers from a nerve problem in an arm.

Like Davies, nose tackle Ryon Bingham could participate in spring practice at some point, but that point is uncertain as practice begins. Bingham, a sophomore-to-be, is recovering from a serious foot injury, which required the insertion of a screw and kept him on the sideline all of last season.

Bingham, another member of the 1999 recruiting class, "made quite a bit of progress for a while and then he kind of leveled off," said Solich. "So we're hoping that he'll be ready to go this spring."

"We're hoping he'll be back because he showed flashes prior to his injury of really being a physical guy that ran well and had the complete package. But I guess it's still kind of wait and see."

Solich also was taking a wait-and-see attitude regarding Manaia Brown's chances of participating at the start of spring practice. Brown, originally a member of the 1999 recruiting class, enrolled in January, but is coming off a knee injury, and "that's still a little bit of a factor," Solich said. ■



Anx

I-back Diedrick ready for most important spring of his career

By Mike Babcock

The night before a Nebraska bowl game, Dahrran Diedrick goes out and doesn't return until the next day. On his way back to the team hotel, in an unfamiliar city, he gets lost.

He stops people on the street to ask for directions. They point and say nothing. As game time draws near, he begins to panic. "I'm walking; I can't find the hotel, and I can't find the stadium," he said, describing a recent dream. "It was weird. I swear to God it felt like it was real."

As the panic reaches its peak, "I wake up, and I'm like, 'Thank God it's not real.'"

Diedrick says he rarely has dreams. But when he does, "I remember them," he said. And those he remembers are always the same. He's late for practice or for a game.

Such dreams have been a bit more common for Diedrick with spring football practice at hand. This is the most important spring of his collegiate career. The junior-to-be is the Cornhuskers' most experienced I-back, following the departure of Dan Alexander and Correll Buckhalter.

Junior-to-be Dahrran Diedrick is the most experienced returning I-back. In two seasons as a backup, he has rushed for 515 yards and five touchdowns.

ious Times

Diedrick begins the spring atop the depth chart, competing in a group that includes DeAntae Grixby, Thunder Collins and Robin Miller, who also was a back-up at fullback last season. "They don't want to be where they're at (on the depth chart)," said Diedrick. "Nobody is just going to settle for No. 2 or No. 3. So I know all the people are working hard to try to get what I'm trying to get."

He is several steps ahead of Grixby, Collins and Miller in experience, having first enrolled in January of 1998. So this will be his fourth spring of practice, one more than most juniors-to-be.

The extra spring, which was followed by a redshirt season, was valuable. "I don't know how hard it would be to come and be expected to know the plays right away," Diedrick said.

"I had a whole spring to learn the plays. I think that helped a lot. But even during the spring I really didn't catch onto things until summer because during the spring, it's usually the people that have already been here. I was just kind of thrown in there and had to pick it up."

To that end, he was helped by other I-backs, among them Alexander, Buckhalter and DeAngelo Evans. "You start at the bottom. You've just got to work your way up," said Diedrick.

Even though they are competing with him, he is committed not only to establishing himself as the No. 1 I-back but also to helping Grixby, Collins, Miller and the others, as he was helped.

"If you don't help the person younger than you, (and) if anything happens to you, then you're going to



Dahrran Diedrick rushed for 93 yards against Kansas State as a freshman, including a career-best 46-yard touchdown run.

have somebody in there that's not prepared, not ready," Diedrick said.

He has prepared himself since the Alamo Bowl game, in which he car-

ried four times for 28 yards and a touchdown, following advice from Buckhalter, his roommate.

Buckhalter encouraged him to work on his pass receiving skills, and he did, regularly working with quarterback Jammal Lord in the Cook Pavilion in the afternoons.

Eric Crouch was unable to throw, following shoulder surgery.

"There were a couple of us," said Diedrick, including redshirted freshman split end Ben Zajicek. "We'd throw the ball around, spend like two hours sometimes."

However long they worked, Diedrick was focused. The receiving wasn't recreational.

He wasn't "running deep patterns, like (wide) receivers run," he said.

"I was just running screens, outs, flats . . . patterns like I'd run (as an I-back), so I get real comfortable at the position and how the ball's going to come. I want to get my hands good enough so the coaches will be able to see it and so that will be another thing we're able to do (offensively)."

The Cornhuskers rarely threw to the I-backs last season. Buckhalter, who has impressed NFL scouts with his pass catching ability, was the leader, catching five passes for 85 yards, 34 of them on a touchdown play against Missouri. Alexander caught two passes. And Diedrick had one catch for 12 yards, also against Missouri. Fullback Judd Davies caught three passes out of the backfield.

Even if there were to be an increased emphasis on throwing to the I-backs, and Coach Frank Solich hasn't indicated that's his intention, Diedrick will win the starting job or not depending on his ability to run

with the ball, something he has done 90 times total in his first two seasons.

He got more carries two seasons ago as a freshman, gaining 303 yards and scoring two touchdowns on 57 attempts. Twice that season he rushed for more than 90 yards in a game, with a high of 99 on 16 carries against Iowa State. He ran for 93 yards on 14 carries against Kansas State.

Nebraska didn't have as many decisive victories last season, which meant the opportunities for back-ups were more limited. Diedrick rushed for 212 yards and three touchdowns on 33 carries.

He anticipated that, given the experienced players ahead of him on the depth chart. Now those players are gone, and "I'm going into spring with a whole new attitude," he said.

"Before, I always kind of knew that, you know, I'll work hard. But it'll be hard to climb the ladder and get up. Now I'm going in there (as) the top I-back. It's a new confidence I have. I'm working hard because I want it. I don't want anybody to take it away from me.

"I'm going to work as hard as I possibly can. With hard work, the work ethic I'm going in with, I don't think anybody will be able to take it away from me."

Diedrick was 45 minutes late getting to the South Stadium for an interview, waking up from a dream after a short nap on a frigid early afternoon in February. In the dream, he had been napping before practice when he woke up with a start and realized that he was going to be late.

Among other things, a flat tire on his car delayed him further, then he couldn't remember where practice was. As he searched in vain, he tried to come up with something to explain his tardiness to the coaches. He was convinced that no matter what he told them, they wouldn't believe him.

He remembers thinking in the dream, "Damn, I'm late, real late. I'm going to be in trouble."

At about that time he awoke, and breathed a sigh of relief.

"My dream was telling me, 'You have somewhere to go. You'd better get up,'" he said.

Fortunately, that somewhere was an interview, not practice. ■

A Long Way from Jamaica

Jamaica is a nice place to visit. Take it from Dahrran Diedrick.

"It's fun when you go back," he said. "It's a real good vacation spot."

As for living there, however, "you want to go," he said. "They call it going 'foreign.'"

The reason for leaving is that as far as most native Jamaicans are concerned, "there's not much," said Diedrick. "You want to go to the United States or Canada, one of them. There are more Jamaicans living outside Jamaica than live in Jamaica. There are more people that have actually left."

He was 10-years old when his family left Montego Bay and moved to suburban Toronto, Canada, in search of "more opportunities, better education, a better life," he said.

The move was understandably traumatic given his age. And the family moved to an area in west Toronto where there weren't many Jamaicans. Even so, the gregarious Diedrick was quick to make friends, and his family soon moved again, to suburban Scarborough on the city's east side.

A lot of people from the Caribbean lived on Toronto's east side, Diedrick said.

It was after the second move that an elementary school friend introduced Diedrick to football. The friend, who played on a youth team, demonstrated the game's fundamentals, using a soccer ball. "We'd play with a soccer ball, at break time or at lunch," said Diedrick. "Nobody had a football."

And no one bothered to ask at school for a football.

Diedrick, who had never seen a football game in person or on television, was immediately taken by the sport — and was more adept at it than the friend who showed him how to play.

In the summer, when he and his friends would debate whether to choose up sides and play football or basketball, the most popular sport in

his neighborhood, he always voted for football.

"That's why I'm not good at basketball," he said. "I never wanted to play basketball."

When he began playing organized football on a local youth league team, he had to play with older boys because of his size. He started as a running back but was moved to linebacker because he had problems learning the plays. "They'd say go right, and I'd go left," he said.

By his second season in the youth league, however, he was playing both linebacker and running back, and by the time he was ready for high school, he was a polished running back.

He considered living with a family in Michigan so he could play high school football in the United States and enhance his chances of earning a college scholarship. And because of his ability, he had opportunities to attend and play football at private schools in Ontario.

"But I just liked playing regular high school football," he said. "I just think that if you work hard and you're good, somebody's going to find out. Somebody's going to notice."

During his junior year, he began sending videotapes to U.S. colleges. The first to respond was Akron. "When you get that (letter), you're like, 'Yes, I'm going to Akron,'" he said.

He figured if no one else took notice, he could play for the Zips.

Other recruiting letters followed Akron's, as many as 30 a day, he said. He considered several Division I-A programs, including Michigan and Michigan State, but settled on Nebraska, because "I wanted to get away" and because of the Cornhuskers' reputation for running the ball.

He rushed for 1,886 yards in only nine games as a high school senior.

Diedrick was Nebraska's first football scholarship recruit from Canada — and, you also could say, from Jamaica, a nice place to visit but probably not one where you'd want to live. ■



Dahrran Diedrick was Nebraska's first scholarship recruit from Canada.

2001 Nebraska Spring Roster

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Yr.	Hometown (school)
98	**Adams, Demoine	LRE	6-2	235	Jr.	Pine Bluff, Ark.
40	Albertson, Matt	IB	5-10	195	Jr.	North Platte, Neb.
27	*Amos, Willie	FS	6-0	185	So.	Sweetwater, Texas
70	Andersen, Jake	OG	6-1	305	RFr.	Littleton, Colo. (J.K. Mullen)
61	Bingham, Ryon	NT	6-3	275	So.	Sandy, Utah (Alta)
22	Blomeier, Rob	ROV	5-11	190	So.	Lititz, Pa. (Manheim Town.)
29	Boettner, Mic	ROV	6-0	205	Sr.	Omaha, Neb. (Millard North)
14	***Booker, Dion	FS	6-1	205	Sr.	Oceanside, Calif. (EICamino)
84	**Bowling, Jon	TE	6-3	230	Jr.	Lincoln, Neb. (Southeast)
26	**Brown, Josh	PK/SE	6-2	190	Jr.	Foyil, Okla.
39	Buller, Chad	WLB	5-11	210	So.	Henderson, Neb. (Heartland)
43	Burrow, Dan	FS	5-10	175	RFr.	Ames, Iowa
48	***Burrow, Jamie	MLB	6-1	225	Sr.	Ames, Iowa
18	Butler, Cody	PK/P	6-0	180	RFr.	Hastings, Neb. (St. Cecilia)
4	*Butler, Terrell	ROV	5-9	190	So.	Austell, Ga. (Pebblebrook)
11	**Chrisman, Joe	QB	5-11	190	Jr.	Longmont, Colo.
55	*Clanton, Jon	NT	6-2	275	Jr.	Glendale, Ariz. (Centennial)
59	*Cody, Wes	OG	6-2	300	Jr.	Fremont, Neb. (Bergan)
1	*Collins, Thunder	IB	6-2	190	Jr.	Los Angeles, Calif. (East Los Angeles/Manual Arts HS)
32	Cook, Kelly	SE	6-1	185	So.	Omaha, Neb. (Burke)
27	Cooper, Ira	SLB	6-2	230	RFr.	Omaha, Neb. (Westside)
81	*Cornelsen, Ben	WB	5-10	190	Jr.	Shawnee, Kan. (Northwest)
3	***Craver, Keyuo	LCB	5-11	190	Sr.	Harleton, Texas
7	***Crouch, Eric	QB	6-1	200	Sr.	Omaha, Neb. (Millard North)
59	Crumpton, Patrick	LB	5-10	215	RFr.	Mavisdale, Va. (Grundy)
82	Dabbert, Will	TE	6-4	245	Jr.	Lincoln, Neb. (East)
4	*Davies, Judd	FB	6-0	240	So.	Omaha, Neb. (Millard North)
27	Davis, Josh	ROV	5-11	195	So.	Loveland, Colo.
50	*Dawson, Jon	OG	6-2	285	So.	Cheyenne, Wyo. (Central)
22	DeAngelis, Sandro	PK	5-8	200	RFr.	Niagara Falls, Ont., Canada (St. Joseph's Collegiate, N.Y.)
32	Demerath, Tim	ROV	6-1	205	Jr.	Plainview, Neb.
2	Demps, Mike	WB	5-10	200	Jr.	Fort Worth, Texas (Dunbar)
30	**Diedrick, Dahrnan	IB	6-0	220	Jr.	Scarborough, Ont., Canada (Cedarbrae Collegiate Inst.)
29	Dunn, Andrew	WB	6-0	220	RFr.	Glenwood, Iowa
78	Erickson, Mike	OG	6-4	270	RFr.	Omaha, Neb. (Papio-LaVista)
88	Estudillo, Chris	RE	6-4	225	So.	Ord, Neb.
64	Flaum, M.J.	OT	6-4	295	RFr.	Westminster, Colo. (Nrthglnn)
77	**Fonoti, Toniu	OG	6-4	335	Jr.	Hauula, Hawaii (Kahuku)
51	Fries, Gabe	SLB	6-2	230	Jr.	Benkelman, Neb. (Dundy Co.)
52	**Garrison, John	C	6-4	285	Jr.	Blue Springs, Mo.
8	***Gibson, John-x	WB	6-0	195	Sr.	Papillion, Neb. (Papio-LaVista)
54	Giebler, Dan	LB	6-1	215	RFr.	Fremont, Neb.
99	**Golliday, Aaron	TE	6-4	285	Jr.	York, Neb.
49	Gragert, Nick	FB	6-0	215	Sr.	Columbus, Neb.
72	Green, Tim	OT	6-4	320	So.	Omaha, Neb. (Westside)
6	*Grixby, DeAntae	IB	5-8	200	So.	Omaha, Neb. (Central)
5	**Groce, DeJuan	RCB	5-10	190	Jr.	Garfield Hgts, Ohio (St. Ed)
26	Guse, Kevin	LCB	5-11	175	So.	Longmont, Colo.
62	Gwennapp, Andy	OG	6-2	290	Jr.	Smith Center, Kan.
89	**Hassebroek, Troy	WB	6-4	220	Jr.	Lincoln, Neb. (Lincoln High)
18	***Hemje, Jeff	RCB	6-0	180	Sr.	Grand Island, Neb.
51	Hoke, Anthony	SLB	6-0	200	So.	Lyndon, Kan.
40	*Hollowell, T.J.	WLB	6-0	215	RFr.	Copperas Cove, Texas
40	Hopkins, Lannie	ROV	6-2	185	RFr.	Rowlett, Texas (Rowlett)
38	Huston, Kellen	CB	5-11	185	RFr.	Ankeny, Iowa
24	Ickes, Matt	RCB	5-10	200	Sr.	Page, Neb. (Orchard)
36	Jackson, Joel	CB	5-10	180	RFr.	Papillion, Neb. (Papio-LaVista)
34	Jisa, Jason	SE	6-4	190	RFr.	Seward, Neb.
23	*Johnson, Blanchard	WLB	5-11	200	So.	Omaha, Neb. (C.B. St. Albert)
88	*Johnson, Trevor	TE	6-4	245	So.	Lincoln, Neb. (Northeast)
94	*Kabongo, Patrick	DT	6-6	315	So.	Montreal, Que. (Vanier Prep)
37	*Kastl, Paul	FB	5-10	230	Jr.	Lincoln, Neb. (Pius X)
42	Keister, Dusty	TE	6-3	240	RFr.	Norfolk, Neb. (Catholic)
57	**Kelsay, Chris	LRE	6-5	255	Jr.	Auburn, Neb.
19	Klem, John	WB	6-0	205	Jr.	Lincoln, Neb. (East)
73	*Koethe, Scott	OT	6-5	325	Jr.	Central City, Neb.
75	***Kollmorgen, Kyle	OT	6-5	305	Sr.	Lincoln, Neb. (Southeast)
74	Kolowski, David	C	6-5	305	Jr.	Omaha, Neb. (Millard West)
67	*Kolterman, Nate	OT	6-3	320	Jr.	Seward, Neb.
39	Kriewald, Steve	FB	5-10	255	RFr.	Scotia, Neb. (N. Loup-Scotia)
46	Larson, Kyle	P	6-0	200	So.	Funk, Neb. (Kearney)
28	Liley, Tim	SE	5-11	195	So.	Lakewood, Colo. (Mullen)
63	Limbaugh, Jack	OG	6-4	280	So.	Algona, Iowa
14	Lindstrom, Brett	QB	6-0	185	So.	Omaha, Neb. (Millard West)
70	***Lohr, Jason	NT	6-2	275	Sr.	Tulsa, Okla. (Jenks)
5	Long, DeWayne	WB	6-0	200	RFr.	W.Des Moines, Iowa (Dowling)
44	Long, Jason	MLB	6-1	210	RFr.	Nebraska City, Neb.
76	*Loos, Chris	OT	6-3	310	So.	Lincoln, Neb. (Southeast)
10	*Lord, Jammal	QB	6-2	210	So.	Bayonne, N.J.
54	Makris, Mike	MLB	5-11	240	So.	Rhineland, Wis.
79	Manning, Stephen	DT	6-1	255	So.	Knoxville, Tenn. (Bearden)
63	Manstedt, Mitch	DT	6-3	275	RFr.	Clarks, Neb.
76	McBride, Jeff	RE	6-4	220	RFr.	Brule, Neb. (South Platte)
33	McGowan, Luke	WB	5-10	165	So.	Schuyler, Neb.
6	McPherson, Lornell	RCB	5-9	175	RFr.	Omaha, Neb. (Central)
16	Mikluscak, Ryan	SE	6-0	190	RFr.	Omaha, Neb. (Bellevue West)
21	*Miller, Robin	IB/FB	5-11	235	So.	Kent, Wash. (Kent-Meridian)
58	Miller, Tim	WLB	6-1	210	So.	Elmwood, Neb. (Elm.-Murdock)
21	Neal, Don	RCB	5-6	155	So.	Henrietta, N.Y. (Rush-Henr.)
61	Nelson, Brian	OG	6-3	305	So.	Omaha, Neb. (Millard West)
85	**Nelson, Casey	NT	6-2	285	Sr.	Newman Grove, Neb.
24	O'Holleran, Jack	WLB	5-10	195	RFr.	North Platte, Neb.
23	Ommert, Ryan	SE	5-10	190	So.	Cambridge, Neb.
25	Otto, Jamie	CB	5-11	180	RFr.	Norfolk, Neb. (Catholic)
78	Peetz, Phil	LRE	6-2	245	So.	Elkhorn, Neb.
44	*Penny, Jon	WLB	6-1	225	Sr.	Lawrence, Kan.
31	*Pippens, Jerrell	FS	6-2	190	So.	Philadelphia, Pa. (W. Catholic)
83	Plooster, Matt	WB	5-10	205	So.	Malcolm, Neb. (Mt. Michael)
69	Povendo, Nick	OT	6-3	305	RFr.	Keller, Texas
35	Reed, Adam	FB	5-11	210	RFr.	Scottsbluff, Neb.
47	Reese, Tim	IB	5-11	250	So.	Seattle, Wash. (O'Dea)
47	Richenberger, Jason	WLB	6-1	205	RFr.	Liberty, Mo.
28	*Ricketts, Pat	LCB	5-11	180	So.	Omaha, Neb. (Millard North)
86	Ringenberg, Kyle	RRE	6-5	245	So.	Elkhorn, Neb.
66	***Rutherford, Jon	C/OT	6-3	300	Sr.	Midwest City, Okla.
50	Safranek, Steve	MLB	6-1	230	So.	Omaha, Neb. (Gross)
11	Schollting, Carl	FS	6-0	210	Sr.	Springfield, Neb. (Spr.-Platte.)
85	Septak, Chris	TE	6-4	245	RFr.	Omaha, Neb. (Millard West)
80	Shada, Alex	TE	6-2	235	RFr.	Wahoo, Neb.
43	**Shanle, Scott	SLB	6-2	230	Jr.	St. Edward, Neb.
53	*Shook, Matt	C	6-2	290	Jr.	Medina, Ohio
13	Siefken, Scott	QB	5-11	190	RFr.	Boerne, Texas
56	***Slechte, Jeremy	DT	6-6	285	Sr.	LaVista, Neb. (Papio-LaVista)
42	Smith, Jemond	WLB	6-0	200	Jr.	Kenner, La. (Bonnabel)
95	**Smith, Justin	LRE	6-4	255	So.	Sherman, Texas
34	*Stella, Randy	WLB	6-0	200	Sr.	Omaha, Neb. (Benson)
16	***Swiney, Erwin	RCB	6-0	185	Sr.	Lincoln, Neb. (Northeast)
96	*Tagoa'i, Junior	NT	6-2	290	So.	Hauula, Hawaii (St. Louis)
90	*Tata, Tony	MLB	6-1	245	Jr.	Honolulu, Hawaii (St. Louis)
2	**Terpening, Aaron	ROV	5-11	185	Jr.	Salem, Ore. (North)
52	*Thomas, Benard	LRE	6-4	240	So.	E. Palo Alto, Calif. (St. Francis)
9	**Thomas, Wilson	SE	6-5	205	Jr.	Omaha, Neb. (North)
31	Thorne, Fred	SE	5-10	175	So.	Lincoln, Neb. (Southeast)
77	Toline, Tyler	RE	6-2	205	RFr.	Wahoo, Neb.
48	Tomasevicz, Curt	FB	6-0	215	RFr.	Shelby, Neb.
9	***Vedral, Mark	WLB	6-1	205	Sr.	Gregory, S.D.
57	Volk, Cody	OT	6-6	310	So.	Norfolk, Neb. (Battle Creek)
58	***Volk, Dave	OT	6-5	290	Sr.	Battle Creek, Neb.
68	*Waldrop, Dan	OG	6-5	320	So.	Wilmington, Calif. (Banning)
41	Walker, Tommicus	LCB	5-11	180	So.	Grand Prairie, Texas (TCU/Sam Houston)
7	Walker, Treoun	CB	5-8	170	So.	Grand Prairie, Texas (Highland CC/Sam Houston)
99	Warrior, Adrian	LRE	6-5	255	Jr.	Bloomfield, Neb. (Cushng, Okla.)
37	White, Jay	LCB	5-9	180	So.	Ashville, N.C. (A.C. Reynolds)
95	**Wichmann, J.P.	RRE	6-4	230	Sr.	Shawnee, Kan. (Northwest)
91	Wigert, Kiffin	SE	5-9	150	RFr.	Cheyenne, Wyo. (Central)
25	Wingender, Andy	FB	5-10	240	So.	Omaha, Neb. (Mt. Michael)
87	***Wistrom, Tracey	TE	6-5	230	Sr.	Webb City, Mo.
20	***Woodward, Wes	ROV	5-8	185	Sr.	Omaha, Neb. (Creighton Prep)
5	Zajicek, Ben	SE	6-0	200	RFr.	Beatrice, Neb.

* — Indicates Letters Earned; -x — pending appeal for sixth season

RFr. — indicates freshmen who redshirted in 2000

Year listed is for fall 2001

OFFENSE

SPLIT END

Returning: Wilson Thomas
 Redshirt: Ben Zajicek
 Other: Josh Brown
 Lost: Matt Davison, Tom Beveridge, Seth Gutz
 Remarks: Thomas, like Davison a year ago, missed winter conditioning in order to play with the Cornhusker basketball team. Now, he'll devote his full attention to football. Finally, he finds himself in a position to catch some passes — he has only one reception in two seasons. Zajicek might have played as a true freshman had there not been as much depth at wide receiver last season. Brown, the place-kicker, will get a serious look. And a walk-on or two will have an opportunity to emerge in a back-up position.

TIGHT END

Returning: Tracey Wistrom, Aaron Golliday, Jon Bowling, Trevor Johnson
 Redshirt: Chris Septak
 Lost: Jake McKee, John Murphy
 Remarks: Wistrom, a two-time, first-team all-conference selection, is the best at one of the team's deepest positions, fueling speculation that someone might consider moving. Such a move doesn't appear to be imminent, however. Golliday was bothered by a shoulder problem last season but is ready to go, as is Bowling, who has been hampered by injuries during his career. Johnson and Septak probably would be competing for starting positions in most programs.

TACKLE

Returning: Dave Volk, *Chris Loos, Dan Waldrop, Kyle Kollmorgen, Scott Koethe, Nate Kolterman
 Redshirt: M.J. Flaum, Nick Povendo
 Other: Tim Green
 Lost: Jason Schwab
 Remarks: Volk has quietly developed into a solid tackle, earning all-conference honorable mention the last two seasons, alongside high-profile players. Because of a knee injury suffered before the team left for the Alamo Bowl, Loos will miss the competition for the other starting job and top back-up positions. Kollmorgen is back in action after being suspended for the bowl game.

GUARD

Returning: Toniui Fonoti, Wes

Cody, Jon Dawson
 Redshirt: Jake Anderson, Mike Erickson
 Lost: Russ Hochstein, Chris Saalfeld

Remarks: Fonoti figures to be Nebraska's designated Outland Trophy candidate following the early departure of center Dominic Raiola. The broken right hand Fonoti suffered in the Oklahoma game is healed. "He's in good shape," said Coach Frank Solich. "It should not be a problem for him at all." Competition among young players to succeed Hochstein will be spirited. "There are kids there. It's just a matter of getting the right ones where they need to be," offensive line coach Milt Tenopir said.

CENTER

Returning: *Jon Rutherford, Matt Shook, John Garrison
 Lost: Dominic Raiola
 Remarks: Raiola's departure for the NFL has created considerably more interest at this position. And with Rutherford, who has played all of the interior line positions, coming off a torn ACL, Shook and Garrison are the only healthy scholarship centers. Shook and Garrison will alternate with the top units during the spring. "Jon's the key," said Tenopir. "He's got experience playing there and being in the action in the heat of battle, regardless of the position. And those other kids will take the challenge, I think."

QUARTERBACK

Returning: *Eric Crouch, Jammal Lord, Joe Chrisman
 Lost: none
 Remarks: Solich holds out hope that Crouch will be able to take some handoffs during the spring, though he definitely won't be throwing any passes or taking any hits. There's nothing Nebraska needs to learn about the senior from Omaha. "We know exactly what Eric can do," said Solich. Lord and Chrisman will have an opportunity to take snaps with the top units, and earn their teammates' confidence.

I-BACK

Returning: Dahrran Diedrick, DeAntae Grixby, Thunder Collins, Robin Miller
 Lost: Dan Alexander, Correll Buckhalter
 Remarks: Diedrick will start out atop the depth chart. "Dahrran has experience and we think will be a great back,"

Solich said. "But now he needs to step up and take that over." If Diedrick, for some reason, doesn't establish himself as a clearcut No. 1, Grixby and Collins are ready to go. Miller learned the fullback's duties last season, but his heart is at I-back, where he'll get a good look this spring.

FULLBACK

Returning: *Judd Davies, Paul Kastl, Robin Miller
 Redshirt: Steve Kriewald
 Lost: Willie Miller
 Remarks: Davies' health is of considerable concern. He's a potential star at the position, on the order of the best fullbacks in Cornhusker history. His absence from spring practice, if only temporary, will benefit Kastl and Kriewald by allowing them to work with the top units. But Nebraska can't afford to lose Davies long-term. Redshirted freshman walk-on Curt Tomasevich has been impressive in conditioning tests.

WINGBACK

Returning: Troy Hassebroek, Ben Cornelson, John Gibson
 Redshirt: DeWayne Long
 Other: Mike Demps
 Lost: Bobby Newcombe
 Remarks: Depth and experience are concerns here, as they are at split end. The situation would change markedly if the NCAA grants Gibson a sixth season of eligibility. That would seem likely. Even if the decision were to be made in time, however, Gibson would miss spring practice because of a knee injury, suffered in the Alamo Bowl game. Some of those at split end could play here and vice versa.

PLACE-KICKER

Returning: Josh Brown
 Redshirt: Sandro DeAngelis
 Lost: Chace Long
 Remarks: Brown is closing in on the career record for consecutive extra-point kicks, with 99 in a row. Kris Brown holds the record of 125. Even so, with Josh Brown dividing his practice time at wide receiver this spring, and his inconsistency last season, DeAngelis will have an opportunity to compete for the place-kicking job. Also, someone needs to handle kick-offs, following the departure of Long.

Deep-snapper Garrison returns, as does back-up holder Chrisman.

DEFENSE

RUSH END

Returning: Chris Kelsay, Demoine Adams, J.P. Wichmann, Justin Smith, Benard Thomas

Other: *Manaia Brown, Phil Peetz

Lost: Kyle Vanden Bosch, Brandon Mooberry, Matt Grummert

Remarks: Kelsay has the most experience among a group for which there has been high expectations. "Some of them now need to separate themselves," Solich said. Thomas was talented enough to be pulled out of a redshirt early last season, and Brown, originally a member of the 2000 recruiting will join the competition, though his start could be delayed by the lingering effects of a knee injury.

TACKLE

Returning: Jason Lohr, Jeremy Slechta, Jon Clanton, Casey Nelson, Patrick Kabongo, Junior Tagoa'i

Other: *Ryon Bingham

Lost: Loran Kaiser, Brian Wanish, Matt McGinn

Remarks: Lohr and Slechta are proven players, but more than two tackles are needed in the Cornhuskers' scheme. Clanton, who has the athleticism to play on the outside, figures to work his way into the rotation. Bingham will be a welcome addition if he has finally recovered from a severe foot injury. Bingham is a "key, to a degree," said Solich. But "we'll have enough depth there."

STRONGSIDE LINEBACKER

Returning: Scott Shanle, T.J. Hollowell

Redshirt: Ira Cooper

Lost: Rod Baker

Remarks: Shanle is a proven player, and returning starter. After him, however, the position is wide-open. Defensive coordinator and linebackers coach Craig Bohl plans to try Hollowell on the weakside. Shanle played sparingly in some games last season when Nebraska went to its "nickel" package. Even so, he'll need some back-up support, which means someone at another position might get a look this spring.

MIDDLE LINEBACKER

Returning: Jamie Burrow, Tony Tata

Lost: Carlos Polk

Remarks: Replacing Polk will be no small task. Burrow is the only player with experience at the position. When he "got his chances, he played very, very well," said Solich. "But that will be a battle this spring to see exactly who's where there." Cooper, a strongside linebacker, has size and could get a look in the middle. "There's always a possibility we could slide a guy in there," Bohl said.

WEAKSIDE LINEBACKER

Returning: Randy Stella, Mark Vedral, Jon Penny, Blanchard Johnson

Redshirt: Jason Richenberger

Lost: none

Remarks: Stella has the physical skills to be outstanding and Vedral's return early last season was most welcome. Richenberger will get a look on the strongside and Hollowell will try the weakside, as Bohl tries to get the best players on the field. With the addition of Richenberger and the return of Penny and Johnson, there should be plenty of depth at the position. "Where you fit those guys, that's going to be really important, I think," said Bohl. "I'm somewhat comfortable. I think we've got some athleticism."

CORNERBACK

Returning: Keyuo Craver, *DeJuan Groce, Erwin Swiney, Pat Ricketts, Jeff Hemje

Redshirt: Lornell McPherson

Lost: Dwayne McClary

Remarks: The top three cornerbacks return, making this one of the team's most solid positions. With Groce missing the spring following shoulder surgery similar to Crouch's, the young players will have a chance to catch the seasoned eye of secondary coach George Darlington. With the increased offensive emphasis on passing, the Cornhuskers can never have enough good corners.

FREE SAFETY

Returning: Dion Booker, Willie Amos, Jerrell Pippens

Lost: Troy Watchorn, Eric Fischer

Remarks: The Cornhuskers were hard hit by departures at the safety positions, leaving Booker as the only experienced player at either. He can play both positions. Otherwise, the

competition will be wide-open. Amos was among four true freshmen to play last season. He also could play rover. "It's not out of the realm of possibility," said Darlington. "The only thing is, he's, in some ways, a free safety type as far as covering the field. But the main thing is, you don't want to not put your best players on the field."

ROVER

Returning: Aaron Terpening, Wes Woodward, Terrell Butler

Redshirt: Lannie Hopkins

Other: Josh Davis, Rob Blomeier

Lost: Joe Walker, Clint Finley, Taylor Gehman

Remarks: Davis, who is recovering from a knee injury, Butler and Hopkins all are moving from other positions to join in the competition for playing time. Davis was an I-back. Butler played cornerback as a true freshman. And Hopkins arrived at Nebraska as an outside linebacker. Darlington plans to move around all of the defensive backs to find the right combination. "We want to be ready to go, the first ball game, with seven, eight, nine defensive backs that we have confidence in," he said. Tim Demerath, a transfer, is among several walk-ons who will get a good look at rover.

PUNTER

Returning: none

Other: Kyle Larson

Lost: Dan Hadenfeldt

Remarks: Hadenfeldt cannot petition the NCAA for another season of eligibility. His collegiate career is finally at an end. But Larson, a walk-on from tiny Funk, Neb., by way of Kearney High School, will be a more-than-capable replacement, according to Josh Brown. "He and Dan were definitely head-to-head all the time," said Brown. "Kyle is going to throw some people for a loop, I think. He's going to really show people what he can do." Brown and DeAngelis both were outstanding high school punters. "I'm punting OK, but nothing like that kid," Brown said of Larson, a sophomore-to-be.

* — injured, could miss all or part of spring practice or be limited

Close Calls

Collier sees positives in 14-16 season

Barry Collier's first season as Nebraska men's basketball coach ended in characteristic fashion. Kansas State defeated the Cornhuskers 62-58 in the first round of the Big 12 Tournament, with the winning points coming on a 12-foot, falling-away shot with 1.5 seconds remaining.

Kansas State added to the margin of victory with two free throws, after intercepting Nebraska's desperation in-bounds pass. But two points or four, it hardly mattered.

The Cornhuskers had come oh-so-close, only to have victory snatched from their grasp.

That loss was Nebraska's ninth by four points or fewer in 2000-01. If just five of those nine had gone the other way, the Cornhuskers could have played in the National Invitation Tournament — or even the NCAA Tournament, depending on which of the five had gone in their favor.

They lost to Iowa State in Lincoln 60-59 on a basket with 8-tenths of a second remaining. And they lost to Kansas 78-74 at home, despite shooting only 40.3 percent from the field.

Reversing those two alone would have given them a 9-7 record in conference play and almost certainly would have gotten them into the NIT. They were that close.

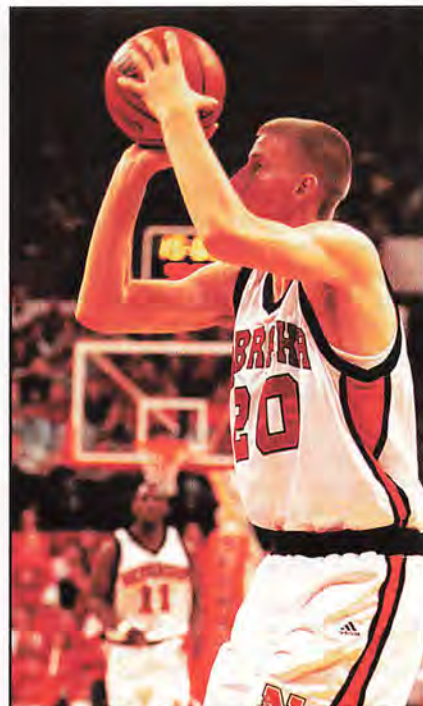
On the other hand, they also won five games by three points or fewer, which means their record might have been worse than 14-16. The potential for such speculation aside, Collier saw something positive in the close games, which gave the Cornhuskers "a chance not to just throw away with complete doubt what we are doing," he said before the final home game, a 97-69 victory against Texas A&M.

"The things we are doing are good enough to win, compete in every game that we've played virtually. And then it sort of falls back on how we do those things. That's been our challenge.

"Our biggest challenge is coming with that intensity every night and every possession, dealing with the ups



Scott Braun



Junior Cary Cochran (left) and redshirt freshman Brian Conklin played the most minutes among the underclassmen. Cochran started 23 games and Conklin six.

and downs of missed shots and fouls and minutes played."

Sometimes Nebraska met those challenges. And sometimes it did not.

The season's theme, expressed by Collier in different ways in just about every one of his weekly news conferences as well as after most games, was consistent inconsistency.

Once conference play began, the Cornhuskers never won or lost more than two games in a row.

Nebraska tended to play to the level of its competition, according to Collier.

Sometimes it won those games. And sometimes it didn't.

However, "that should not be the way we operate," Collier said before the A&M game. "Rather, we need to play the best we can and wherever the opponent's play falls, then so be it."

The Cornhuskers played the best they could against A&M and, on balance, they probably played about as well as they could in their final regular-season game, an 86-73 loss at Iowa State.

Despite playing without center Kimani Ffriend, who missed the game after suffering a tear in his right medial collateral ligament during practice the day before, they gave Iowa State a

scare.

Then they lost to a Kansas State team they had beaten twice.

Ffriend, one of Nebraska's five seniors, played 11 minutes of the second half of the Kansas State game with the injured knee, grabbing six rebounds and blocking two shots.

Collier's first season was the last for Ffriend, Cookie Belcher, Steffon Bradford, Rodney Fields and Craig Wortmann. "I really think all of them have had very, very good years in that they have improved and played and led and learned a lot," said Collier. "We've asked them to do those things, where it could have been just to try to cruise through a senior year and not make adjustments to a new system or maybe become more selfish off the season before, when things didn't go well. That has not happened."

The non-seniors, among them regulars Cary Cochran, Kevin Augustine, John Robinson II, Brian Conklin and Wilson Thomas, were similarly conscientious about trying to adjust.

Did they gain a complete understanding of Collier's system?

"No," said Collier. "But that's just part of the learning process. The teacher doesn't stop teaching because

the students haven't learned it all yet. I think you just have to, every minute you get with them, try to help them learn. Some lessons we've learned we've had to re-learn. So I guess the question would be, 'Well, did you learn it in the first place?' But the fact is, we're trying to form numerous habits, on and off the floor and promote certain behavior and leave behind other kinds of behavior.

"I think what we've put in with this year's team, offense and defense, just X's and O's, is not a complete measure of that because this is the first year with it all. We have introduced a lot. The expectations that I have for these guys are high. And I think they know that.

"Maybe it's a backhanded way of complimenting them because I think they can do it."

Collier's second team will look significantly different than his first because, for all intents and purposes, Cochran will be the only returning starter. Augustine and Conklin, a red-shirted freshman forward whose playing time increased as the season went along, had 15 starts between them.

All of the players "definitely have gone in the direction that we want to go in," Collier said. "Are we going fast enough? No. And that's part of it. I said they don't understand. The other side of that is, they've come a long way, and I'm pleased with them. I'm really happy for them."

He was happy for them in their learning process, but certainly not their record.

Although Collier had no preconceptions about his first team at Nebraska, finishing 14-16 wasn't what he had in mind. "I didn't really spend a lot of time thinking about where we'd be at the very end," he said philosophically. "It's enough to accept the day's challenges and attack from there."

He used to look at his team's schedule and speculate about which games would be wins and which losses, "kind of make up what I thought we'd finish and stick it in the drawer," he said.

He would "forget about it every other year," he said. "But most years pick it back out and look at it. I thought that was probably a waste of about 10 minutes of my time. So I stopped doing that."

Such speculation requires "factoring in losing," which doesn't help a coach or his team.

So Collier decided the best approach to a season was to "prepare stuff that's going to help us the whole year, regardless. We're always trying to win, and then just go from there. I think that's what the best teams do. They don't look too far ahead, nor do they stay lost in the past." ■

Belcher Tops NU's Charts

The season didn't end the way Cookie Belcher would have wanted, but it wasn't for lack of effort on his part. The senior guard scored a team-high 20 points in the Cornhuskers' 62-58 loss against Kansas State in the Big 12 Tournament, to finish with 492 points for the season and 1,552 for his career.

He leaves Nebraska ranked eighth in career scoring, just 25 points behind his cousin Tyrone Lue.

Belcher has left his mark throughout the Cornhusker record book, finishing atop the career lists in steals (353), games (131), starts (128) and minutes played (4,099).

His career-steals total ranks third all-time in the NCAA. And he also ranks second in career assists at Nebraska, with 477, and sixth in career blocked shots, with 83.

Belcher played 34 minutes a game this season and led the Cornhuskers in scoring, averaging 16.4 points. "He's clearly developed his shot to be more of a threat offensively than the book was on him when I first got here," said first-year Coach Barry Collier. "And that's his doing in the off-season."

Belcher worked to make himself better and did whatever was asked of him, for the good of the team. That meant moving from a wing, his natural position, to point guard at times.

He showed "early on that he could be a scorer and do some things for this team at a wing, and then we asked him to play a lot more point and he did that unselfishly," Collier said.

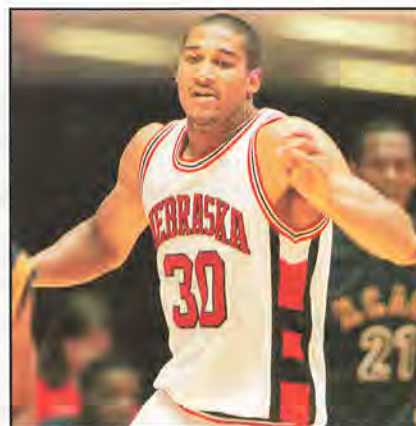
"I've had to ask him to be more versatile than any player in the past because of just our need for him to do that. I think his willingness to do that in his senior year, and just accept it and do it, not think about it or begrudgingly do it... he just accepted it as something this team has needed."

He also assumed a leadership role. "He talks about being somewhat reluctant to lead vocally, but clearly his play he's given us on the floor, start to finish, big picture, has been really good."

Belcher earned second-team all-conference recognition, but he would have gotten Collier's vote as a first-team choice. "You can take points and rebounds and assists and steals and all those things, but you put value on players. You take an MVP from every team in our league and then judge what team they belong on," said Collier. "In this case, what he's done for our team is really significant."

Collier hasn't been one to be effusive in his praise. Even so, Belcher clearly earned his respect this season. "I think he's been worn down this year a little bit from some nagging injuries and that type of thing," Collier said. "But he shows what he can do from time to time."

"Overall, he's as good a guard-wing athlete as I've been around in 25 years of coaching. He's got great straight-ahead speed, anticipation and balance and agility. And his quickness to the ball, to passing lanes and reacting to the ball to tip it and steal it, sometimes is really outstanding." ■



Cookie Belcher left his mark throughout the record book.

Lots of Work to Do

Inconsistent Huskers struggle through 12-18 season

Paul Sanderford regularly received well-meaning encouragement from friends and boosters as his fourth season as the Nebraska women's basketball coach drew to a close.

"Hang in there. It'll get better," they told him.

Sanderford appreciated the interest, but not the sentiment. "I know it's going to get better," he said during a late-season news conference. "I don't need that from anybody. I don't need sympathy or empathy, whatever it is. I don't want it, as a matter of fact. I want to get it done."

The Huskers didn't get it done this season. They finished 12-18, losing 12 of their final 15 games, including a 77-60 loss to Texas in the first round of the Big 12 Tournament.

Senior center Casey Leonhardt, the team's leading scorer, was 0-for-4 from the field and finished with one point against the Longhorns, to characterize the season's frustration.

The record was Nebraska's worst since 10-18 in 1989-90, and it was Sanderford's worst ever. During 18 previous seasons as an NCAA Division I coach, he had never endured more losses than wins.

In fact, his worst record before now occurred a year ago, when the Huskers finished 18-13. And even then, Nebraska was good enough to earn a third consecutive NCAA Tournament bid.

"I was hoping I'd never have to face this, but I had to," said Sanderford, who never gave in, even as the losses mounted. "It's the first situation I've been through like that, and no, I don't have any background. And I certainly don't want to develop any background."

After the Huskers were out-rebounded by 19 and lost their final home game to Baylor, 77-57, some-



Freshman guard Shannon Howell is one of five underclassmen who started at least 10 games for the Huskers.

one pointed to Baylor's turnaround from the previous season as a reason for hope.

"Hope is not particularly the right word that I like to use," Sanderford said.

"I know what it takes to win in this league and win on a national basis. We're not fundamentally

sound enough. We don't make good enough decisions. We're not physically tough enough.

"We've got a lot of work to do. But we have good athletes with great attitudes. And we've got some experience now. We have a point to go back and say, 'Look at this.'"

Eleven of the players Sanderford

took to Kansas City will return next season, including 10 who were either freshmen or sophomores. Their inexperience contributed to an inconsistency that continued to plague Nebraska, and frustrate Sanderford, down the stretch.

The Huskers didn't take care of the ball, finishing last in the Big 12 in turnover margin. They had rebounding problems. And they shot only 37.6 percent from the field in conference play.

"Shooting covers up for being slow. Shooting covers up for not rebounding. And we have shot the ball miserably," Sanderford said prior to the next-to-last game at Oklahoma State.

The Huskers hit 23-of-54 from the field in that game, then hit 19-of-48 against Texas.

"You look down the stat sheet, since Christmas time, we don't have a player shooting over 50 percent. Even Casey (Leonhardt) is shooting 48 or 49 percent, and she's shooting point-blank shots," said Sanderford. "So shooting has been a low for us. I think we have capable shooters.

"We just haven't shot the ball well, whatever the problem might be."

Leonhardt shot over 50 percent from the field, but only 48.8 percent in conference play.

Another significant problem was the erratic play of the Husker guards, particularly at the point. That was reflected by, among other things, the high number of turnovers.

"When our guard play is as erratic as it was the other night, it's very difficult for us to win," Sanderford said after the Huskers committed 27 turnovers in their loss at Baylor.

They finished by committing 22 turnovers, to 10, in their Big 12 Tournament loss.

Leonhardt, guard Amanda Went and forward Monique Whitfield have completed their eligibility but the remainder of the team returns, including Shannon Howell, Greichaly Cepero, Shahidrah Roberts, Paige Sutton and Margaret Richards, all of whom started at least 10 games.

Stephanie Jones and K.C. Cowgill also return. Jones saw more action that all but four other players, and Cowgill, an outside shooting threat, missed 12 games because of a stress reaction in her left foot.

In addition, "we helped our needs, things that we need" in recruiting, Sanderford said. "We need some offense. We need point

guard play. And I think we helped ourselves with that."

The Huskers' recruiting class includes Katie Robinette from South Sioux City, Neb., High and Jina Johansen from Centura, Neb., High as well as Keesha Cannon, a transfer from Penn Valley Community College in Kansas City, Mo. Cannon originally committed to Nebraska out of high school.

Robinette is considered one of the best high school players in state history.

"What I'm going to do is everything humanly possible between now and next October to make darn sure it doesn't happen again," Sanderford said of his first losing season. "Once is enough.

"It's tough. It's tough for all of us. It's not just tough for me. It's tough for my staff and it's tough for the players because our expectations . . . some people have good teams and good years. I've had a good career. And my teams have had good years, year after year after year.

"Good programs do that. Good programs survive."

Sanderford is determined to establish such a program at Nebraska.

"I like the kids that are in the program," he said. "I think they're good enough to play in this league. We've just got to get them better. And we're going to get that done.

"I don't need hope. I need hard work. Am I happy? No. I'm miserable losing. Everybody's miserable. If you're not miserable losing, you need to . . . I need to give somebody my job. When I start accepting losing, accepting not being the best you can be, then I don't need to be coaching."

He hasn't accepted the losses, but he has maintained his optimism for the future, which he describes as bright. He's fine, he said, "other than my stomach being in knots and not being able to eat, not smiling a lot. I haven't gotten a divorce yet. My wife is still living with me."

Obviously, he also has maintained his wry sense of humor. During an 83-55 loss at Missouri, in which the Huskers shot 34.3 percent from the field, he told an official, "I wish you could be more consistent," Sanderford said. "He said, 'I wish your team would play more consistent.'"

"I said, 'You're right.' And I sat down." ■

ATTENTION HUSKER FANS

Individual game tickets and hotel packages are available to all Husker games including the Big 12 Championship and The Rose Bowl which is hosting the National Championship game.

Sept. 1 Troy State	Sept. 8 Notre Dame	Sept. 15 Rice
Sept. 29 at Missouri	Oct. 6 Iowa State	Oct. 13 at Baylor
Oct. 20 Texas Tech	Oct. 27 Oklahoma	Nov. 3 at Kansas
Nov. 10 Kansas State	Nov. 23 at Colorado	

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DIAMOND TRAVEL 15 years in business

He's Back

Comeback from broken jaw just one of many accomplishments for All-American pitcher Komine

By Mike Babcock

Nearly 10 months have passed since Shane Komine was hit by a line drive while pitching the eighth inning of Nebraska's 2-1 victory against Butler in the opening round of the NCAA regional at Minneapolis. But when people recognize him in public, which is common these days, they still ask about it.

Komine, who suffered a broken jaw, accepts the questions with a smile. "It's getting a little bit old," he said. "But I'm not bothered by it. It's expected when something like that happens."

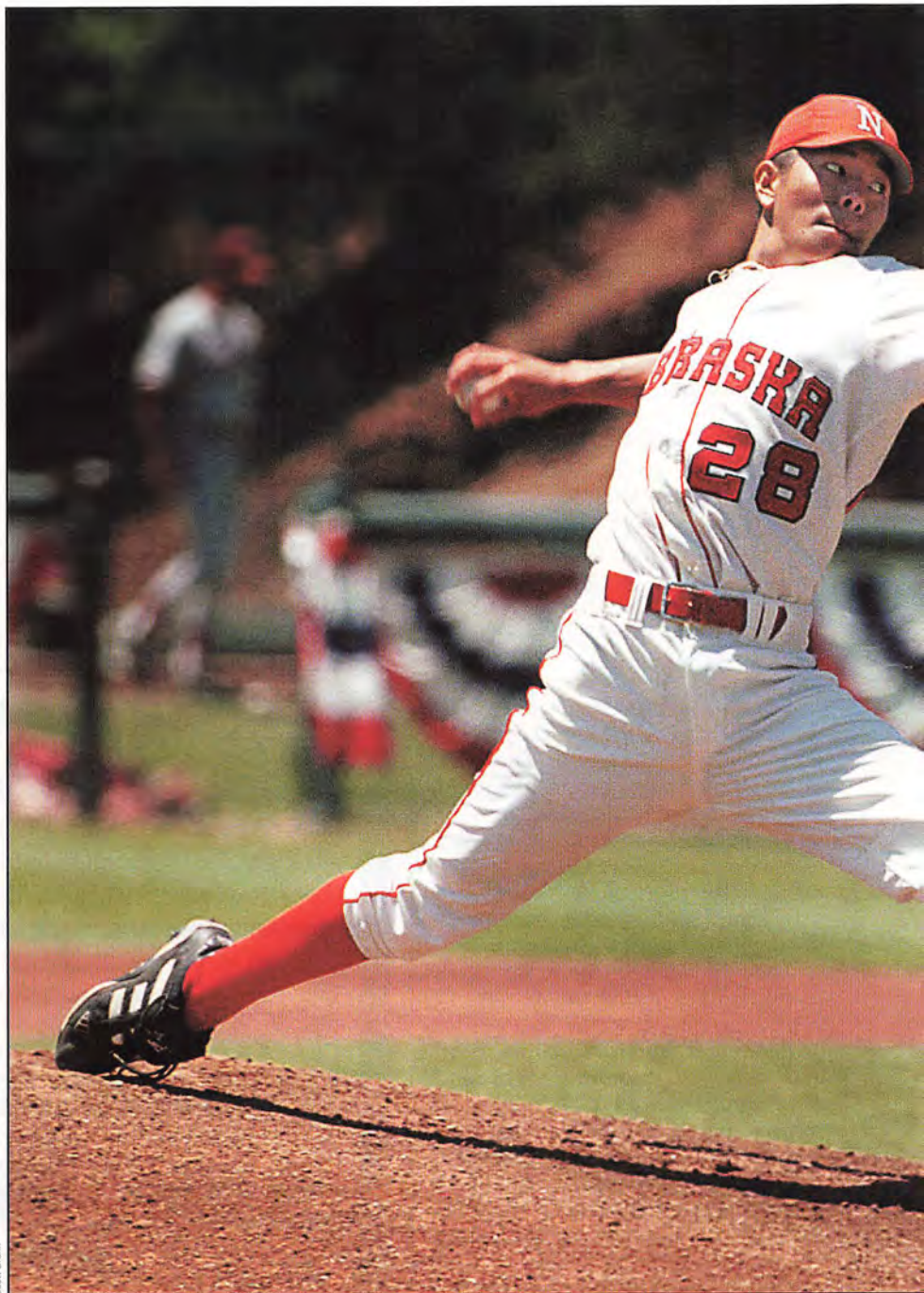
Of all Komine's accomplishments last season, and there were many, his comeback from the broken jaw, on what Cornhusker pitching coach Rob Childress has described as a "one-in-a-million thing," might have been the most remarkable. The injury required four hours of surgery. Yet eight days later, Komine pitched seven innings against Stanford in the second game of the super regional.

Komine continued to deal with the effects of the broken jaw long after the Stanford game, however. His jaw was wired shut for the better part of a month, after he returned home to Honolulu for the summer. And that hampered his workouts, not to mention preventing him from surfing.

"It was kind of hard to breathe through that," he said.

It also was difficult to eat, of course. "It really made me realize that you can't take things for granted, like just being able to chew food," he said. "I appreciate that a lot more now."

While his jaw was wired shut, he



Shane Komine set school records for strikeouts (159) and innings pitched (124.2) last season as a sophomore.

drank energy shakes. He also "ate" pizza and sub sandwiches. But he had to put those things in a blender first. "It was weird, drinking my food," he said.

"It had the same taste, just the texture was a lot different."

And after a while, "I got sick of that," he said.

Not surprisingly, he lost weight, about 20 pounds, down to 140. So once the wiring was removed, and after he spent another week getting used to

for More



moving his jaw, he set about regaining the weight.

When he returned to Nebraska in August, "I didn't really know what I was going to see," said Childress. "He showed up in better shape than he's ever been in."

And he weighed more than he's

ever weighed, a solid 175 pounds.

He spent a lot of time in the weight room in the fall, lifting "until I felt I didn't want to get any bigger," he said. "It can really work against a pitcher if you get too big; where you don't have as much range of motion, you won't feel as loose. And I tried to stay as loose as I could.

"I could feel the difference. I felt a lot stronger. I was throwing harder than I ever did."

At first, because of the added strength, he tended to overthrow. "I didn't have too much control because I was throwing the ball harder and my release point was a little bit off," he said.

By the end of fall practice, however, he had solved the problems with his mechanics and "everything started to fall into place. I felt great. That's the best I've ever felt since I've been here."

Even though he has been winning this spring, his numbers haven't been as impressive as they were a year ago, when he was the Big 12 Player of the Year, Nebraska's first since Darin Erstad shared the award in 1995, and earned first-team All-America honors — the 10th Cornhusker to do so.

Some of that could be traced to an over-reliance on a slider to the exclusion of his curveball, a pitch selection that he and Childress discussed and planned to change after he allowed five earned runs in seven innings of a 9-6 victory against Kansas State in the Cornhuskers' home opener.

But then, he's probably not going to post numbers comparable to last season's, anyway.

As a sophomore, Komine was 11-4 with a 2.24 earned-run average and 159 strikeouts in 124.2 innings. The strikeouts and innings pitched were Cornhusker records.

He was unbeatable during the heart of the Big 12 regular season. After allowing three earned runs in 4.2 innings of a 4-2 loss at Baylor in late March, he allowed just six earned runs, with 65 strikeouts and only seven walks, in his next 50 innings. During that stretch, he was 6-0 with a 1.08 ERA.

In consecutive outings, he struck out 17 against Kansas and 16 against Missouri.

"I don't think any of us can expect



#28 Shane Komine

Pitcher
5-10, 175
Junior
Right-hander
Honolulu,
Hawaii

Career Pitching Record

Yr.	G	IP	W	L	SO	BB	ERA
1999	18	88.0	6	2	79	37	3.58
2000	17	124.2	11	4	159	31	2.24
2001*	5	32.2	4	1	38	14	5.23

*Through March 9

Shane to strike out 175, 200 people," said Childress. "I mean, everybody's going to bear down because of what he did last year. If he can win 15 games with a 5.15 ERA, I think we'll all be happy. I think that needs to be his goal, just winning baseball games.

"Some of those aren't as pretty as others. And that's OK as long as we're winning."

Komine was still averaging more than a strikeout per inning through the first month of competition, even though "he hasn't thrown as good as he's capable of throwing," Childress said.

Unlike last season, he isn't going to surprise hitters.

"Now people are out to prove they can score a run or two runs off of him," said Childress. "For some people, I think, it's a bonus if they make contact against him."

Komine went out to dinner in Lincoln with his father, an uncle and his grandparents after the Kansas State game, the first his uncle and grandparents had seen him pitch at Nebraska.

A stranger approached him and began talking, much to his grandparents' surprise. Komine took the interruption in stride. "It's a good feeling to know people recognize you," he said.

"He asked how the game went and congratulated me."

The stranger did not ask about the broken jaw, which is rare even 10 months after the fact. ■

The Leader

ALLSPORTS

By Todd Henrichs

All-American Walker helps young Husker pitchers adjust

For Leigh Ann Walker, her freshman season was like walking on eggshells. The power pitcher didn't want to step on anyone's toes.

A touted recruit from the softball-rich state of Arizona, Walker arrived at Nebraska in 1999 on the heels of the Huskers' much-bally-hooded trip to the Women's College World Series. She was to join arms with Jenny Voss, an All-American who had carried the NU pitching staff for two seasons.

The two players got along just fine, but Walker always wondered where she fit in that first year. It wasn't until the Big 12 Conference Tournament that she felt comfortable, far too late to have the kind of impact she and others had anticipated.

Coming off her own All-American season, Walker doesn't want to see the same thing happen to the two freshmen joining the NU staff this year. Since practices began last fall, Walker has made it her goal to jump-start the promising careers of Peaches James and Katie Decker.

"When you come in as a freshman, you're really intimidated," Walker said. "You're a lot of times intimidated by your fellow pitchers who are older. I know that's the way I felt when I was a freshman."

"I want to do everything in my power to make them feel comfortable and let them know that this isn't about one person. It takes more than one pitcher to win a national championship."

Contending for the title is clearly a goal for the Huskers even though Voss is gone and Nebraska starts just one senior. Jamie Fuente, a native Oklahoman, is spearheading plans to get NU back to the Women's CWS this year.

A year ago, Oklahoma emerged as national champion in Oklahoma City



Leigh Ann Walker finished 21-6 as a sophomore and was named a second-team All-American.

after losing twice to the Huskers during the season.

"That was a big reality check for us," Walker said. "We could be there. We should be there. We could win the whole thing."

"That just showed us that we are that capable of a team."

Even with the addition of two talented freshmen, Walker's performance in the circle will likely determine where Nebraska goes this season.

In her first two years, Walker established herself as the dominant strike-out pitcher in the Big 12 Conference. She won 21 games a year ago, joining with Voss to become the first twin 20-game winners for NU in a single season.

With snow still covering the ground in Lincoln, Walker moved into third on Nebraska's all-time strikeout list this spring. She averaged between 10 and 11 strikeouts through the Huskers' first

24 games. Her earned-run average was a career best 1.48 even after NU had faced 11 ranked opponents in early-season tournaments, compiling a 15-9 record.

Nebraska Coach Rhonda Revelle certainly isn't surprised to see the anchor of her pitching staff doing the job on and off the field.

"I think Leigh Ann has it in very good perspective," Revelle said. "She's comfortable with who she is and her role. She understands that really we're only as good as our staff."

A right-hander, Walker throws a classic rise-ball. She spent her offseason fine tuning that and other pitches, hoping to elevate her performance this season.

James and Decker are the perfect complements to Walker. James, the most decorated pitcher from the Nebraska high-school ranks, works low in the strike zone. Decker has a dangerous curve.

"We all just respect each other because each of us is so different," said Decker, a Colorado native. "We all complement each other, and that's what is bringing us all together. We know if we work as a team and all as one, we'll go farther than if we each are individuals."

Walker says she's the strongest she's been in her career. For years, doctors had told her to be careful on her knees, even saying she shouldn't bat or go through conditioning workouts with the rest of the team.

Since summer, she's gone all out to prove them wrong and hasn't missed a single training session. In the locker room, she's lifting spirits and has the young pitchers running with the idea that they can do great things in their first year.

Preseason No. 12-ranked Nebraska, she believes, has the chemistry necessary to stay in the title chase all season. And it's the Huskers' opponents who now have to be on their toes.

"We call ourselves a lot more scrappy team. We just go out and play," Walker said. "We work on all the technicalities in practice, but once it's time to play, it's just going out and letting instinct take over."

"This team brings that out in each other." ■

Fighting Adversity

Gymnastics 'family' helps Ingram cope with father's death

By Steve Sipple

Nebraska freshman gymnast Alecia Ingram, by her own admission, is far less outgoing than her father was. She's generally quiet and reserved, like her mother USED to be.

"My father told me, during my freshman year of college, that I had to learn to stand on my own two feet," Jo Ann Ingram recalled. "I was an only child, too, and my parents weren't going to be there to fight my battles for me. I had to learn to open up and open my mouth."

"Alecia's really starting to open up a lot more."

Alecia Ingram obviously has a lot of fight inside her.

Otherwise, the 5-foot-2 native of Knoxville, Tenn., wouldn't have emerged as the Huskers' top gymnast this season despite her father's death in September.

Eddie Ingram was struck down by cancer at age 54, casting a tragic shadow on Alecia's first season in Lincoln.

"It was horrible," said Jo Ann Ingram, watching her daughter at a recent practice at Mable Lee Hall on the Nebraska campus. "I've been trying to come to Lincoln as often as I can, because we really need each other right now."

Eddie Ingram was outgoing and jovial, "one of the good guys (and) just a lot of fun to be around," said Nebraska Coach Dan Kendig. "What a neat guy..."

Eddie would be proud right now, proud of the way his daughter kept battling in the wake of his death. A former member of the U.S. Senior National Team, Ingram led the team and ranked eighth nationally with her all-around average of 39.23 at the season's midpoint in late February.

Come April, Ingram hopes to be leading Nebraska to the NCAA Championships, where last season the Huskers placed fourth, tying the best finish at nationals in the program's 25-year history.

"I think Alecia's done better than ever could be expected under the circumstances," Kendig said. "She's done an incredible job of coping. I think she's



Alecia Ingram set freshman records in the vault (9.925), the balance beam (9.925) and the all-around (39.625).

just taken her father's attitude — you know, stuff happens, get over it."

Said Ingram: "It's difficult now. But you have to try to believe things happen for a reason. That's hard sometimes. I just come in thinking every day is a gift, and that I have to come in and try my hardest."

Eddie and Jo Ann Ingram came to Lincoln for a couple weeks at the start of the first semester to help in their daughter's transition to college life. Around that time Eddie began feeling ill and was diagnosed with pneumonia. When his health failed to improve, he went to the hospital, and tests revealed cancer.

Neither Eddie nor Jo Ann has much of an extended family, so mother and daughter cope mostly as a tandem. But Alecia's teammates also help in the healing process.

"This is definitely a team — they're a family," Jo Ann Ingram said of an 11-athlete squad that includes four freshmen and five sophomores. "They've helped Alecia tremendously. Dan came to Eddie's funeral, and so did (Nebraska men's gym coach) Francis Allen. That meant more to her than anything could have."

Alecia Ingram wasn't used to being on a team — not in the true sense of the word, anyway. Although she's a former member of the U.S. Senior National Team, it's basically everyone for themselves at the elite level of the sport, she said.

When Ingram made her recruiting visit to Lincoln, she was taken by

Nebraska's team unity and commitment. She turned down scholarship offers from Georgia, Utah, Louisiana State and Auburn, among others.

"I saw something in this team that I didn't see anyplace else," she said. "But I think (Dad) saw something in the whole city and school that I didn't quite see until I came here. I can't really put it into words, but it's been pretty awesome."

Jo Ann Ingram credits Kendig for the program's upbeat atmosphere.

"Dan's always positive, and that creates a positive atmosphere with the girls. And they're ALL important to him."

Ingram's status as an all-arounder became particularly important as All-American A.J. Lamb battled a back injury throughout the first half of the season, often competing in just one event. Ingram, meanwhile, eclipsed three freshman scoring records.

Kendig expected a lot from Ingram. After all, she moved to Oklahoma in 1999 to train under former U.S. Olympic coach Steve Nunno at Dynamo Gymnastics, the same club that produced Olympian Shannon Miller as well as former Husker NCAA champion Heather Brink.

Ingram represented the U.S. at several international competitions, and Kendig said she might have made the 2000 U.S. Olympic team if not for a leg injury.

"She's really amazing," he said. "Every time she says she's going to do something, she comes through." ■

Top 15

Recruiting class rankings don't mean that much to college coaches

By James Hale

College football coaches tell us that recruiting rankings really don't mean much and that they really don't pay any attention to them.

That's probably true to a certain extent, however, the recruiting rankings always seem to resemble the national polls. The national powers always seem to be the teams that are rated highly in recruiting.

Here is this writer's look at the top recruiting classes in college football for 2001.

1. FLORIDA STATE: They say that Bobby Bowden never goes off campus anymore to recruit. If that is the case, then he is the best closer in college football, period. The Seminoles hauled in the best cornerback in the country on signing day in Dominique Robinson of Diamond Bar, Calif., and three other All-Americans. Running back Eric Shelton of Lexington (Bryan Station), Ky., linebacker Willie Jones of Miami (Carol City), Fla., and running back Willie Reid of Warner Robins, Ga., all chose the Seminoles at the last minute. The class has six players ranked in the top 30 in the country and 17 players among the top 100.

2. MICHIGAN: The Wolverines have been a recruiting power for years, and this year was no exception. Michigan put together a star-studded class that rivals FSU's. Running back Kelly Baraka of

Portage (Northern), Mich., is regarded as one of the top five players in the country. Wide receiver Tim Massaquoi of Orefield (Parkland), Pa., may be the best in the country. Cornerback Marlin Jackson of Sharon, Pa., is the best cover corner in the country, and don't be surprised if he doesn't line up at wide receiver as well.

3. MIAMI: The fact that Miami lost Coach Butch Davis to the pros late in the recruiting process didn't hurt that much. The Hurricanes recruit on reputation, no matter who the coach is, and first-year head man Larry Coker hauled in a fine class. On signing day, Miami added All-America tight end Kellen Winslow of San Diego (Scripps Ranch), Calif., the son of the great Kellen Winslow, who starred in the NFL with San Diego. Defensive end Orien Harris of Newark, Del., is one of the top 20 players in the country. Miami signed 13 players among the top 100 in the country.

4. OKLAHOMA: The Sooners played off their national championship year with a recruiting class that challenges for the recruiting national title. Defensive tackle Tommie Harris of Killeen (Ellison), Texas, is arguably the best defensive player in the country. Brandon Jones of Texarkana (Liberty-Eylau), Texas, is the best wide receiver in Texas, and quarterback Brent Rawls of Shreveport (Evangel), La., is ranked among the top 10 nationally.

5. LSU: Nick Saban said that he would return LSU to a national power, and this recruiting class will go a long way toward doing that. The Tigers signed a star-studded class, headed by tight end Marcus Spears of Baton Rouge (Southern Lab), La., and offensive lineman Ben Wilkerson of Hemphill, Texas. It also included wide receiver Michael Clayton of

Baton Rouge (Christian Life) and defensive tackle Marquise Hill of New Orleans (De La Salle).

6. TEXAS: Mack Brown continues to recruit stellar classes. Cedric Benson of Midland (Lee), Texas, is the best running back in Texas. Athlete Quan Cosby of Mart, Texas, picked the Longhorns during the final week and has the potential to be a star wide receiver. The Longhorns signed eight offensive linemen.

7. TENNESSEE: Never count out the Volunteers in recruiting, and once again, they are celebrating a great recruiting class in Knoxville. Kevin Simon of Concord (De La Salle), Calif., is the top linebacker in the country. Running back Jabari Davis of Stone Mountain (Tucker), Ga., rushed for 6,000 yards in his high school career.

8. WASHINGTON: The Huskies pulled in the top class on the West Coast. Reggie Williams of Tacoma (Lakes), Wash., is an All-America wide receiver who will give the Huskies a deep threat for years. Kia Ellis of San Francisco City College is the top rated junior college linebacker.

9. UCLA: Back in the glory days of the 1970s and 1980s, the Bruins used to live in the upper echelon of college recruiting. Then, they slipped in the '80s and '90s, but with this class, they clearly are back. Free safety Matt Ware of Los Angeles (Loyola) is a top-20 prospect nationally. Combine Ware with strong safety Jibril Raymo of Beverly Hills, Calif., and there isn't a team in the country that recruited a better pair of safeties.

10. USC: That fact that USC is the third team in the Pac-10 ranked in the top 10 should make for interesting Saturday afternoons out West. Shaun Cody of Hacienda Heights (Los Altos), Calif., is the best pure pass rushing defensive end in the country. Matt Lienart of Santa Anna (Mater Dei), Calif., is a top quarterback.

11. GEORGIA: Despite a coaching change, the Bulldogs pulled in a star-studded class that is drawing

praise from all over the country. Georgia signed All-America quarterback D.J. Shockley of College Park (North Clayton), a big-time passer. Marquies Elmore of Folkston (Charlton County), Ga., is one of the top pass rushing defensive ends. Georgia signed eight players ranked in the national top 150.

12. OHIO STATE: The Buckeyes also ushered in a new coach with an outstanding class. You have to be strong in the defensive line in the Big 10, and defensive end Simon Fraser of Upper Arlington, Ohio, is one of the best in the country. Running back Maurice Hall of Columbus (Brookhaven), Ohio, will keep the running game churning, and Dustin Fox of Canton (Glenoak), Ohio, will be the next great safety out of Ohio State.

13. NEBRASKA: The Huskers signed another outstanding group, headed by two good run/pass quarterbacks in Mike McLaughlin of Omaha (Millard North), Neb., and Mike Stuntz of Council Bluffs (St. Albert), Iowa. Titus Adams of Omaha (Creighton Prep) and LeKevin Smith of Macon (Stratford Academy), Ga., are top defensive tackle prospects.

14. KANSAS STATE: Normally you wouldn't rate a team that relied so much on junior college talent this highly, but the Wildcats' JUCO class is so good that you can't pass them up. Quarterback Marc Dunn of Ricks (Idaho) College is the top JUCO signal caller in the country. Bobby Walker of Trinity Valley (Texas) CC is the No. 1 JUCO cornerback. On the prep front, the Wildcats signed All-America wide receiver Jerome Janet of Tulsa (Union), Okla.

15. CLEMSON: The Tigers struck gold with All-America wide receiver Roscoe Crosby of Buffalo (Union), S.C., one of the top receivers in the country. He will team with two other All-Americans in wide receivers Tymere Zimmermann of Bennettsville (Marlboro County), S.C., and Airese Currie of Columbia (Richland Northeast), S.C.

The remaining five in the top 20 are Auburn, Georgia Tech, Virginia Tech, Notre Dame and Stanford. ■



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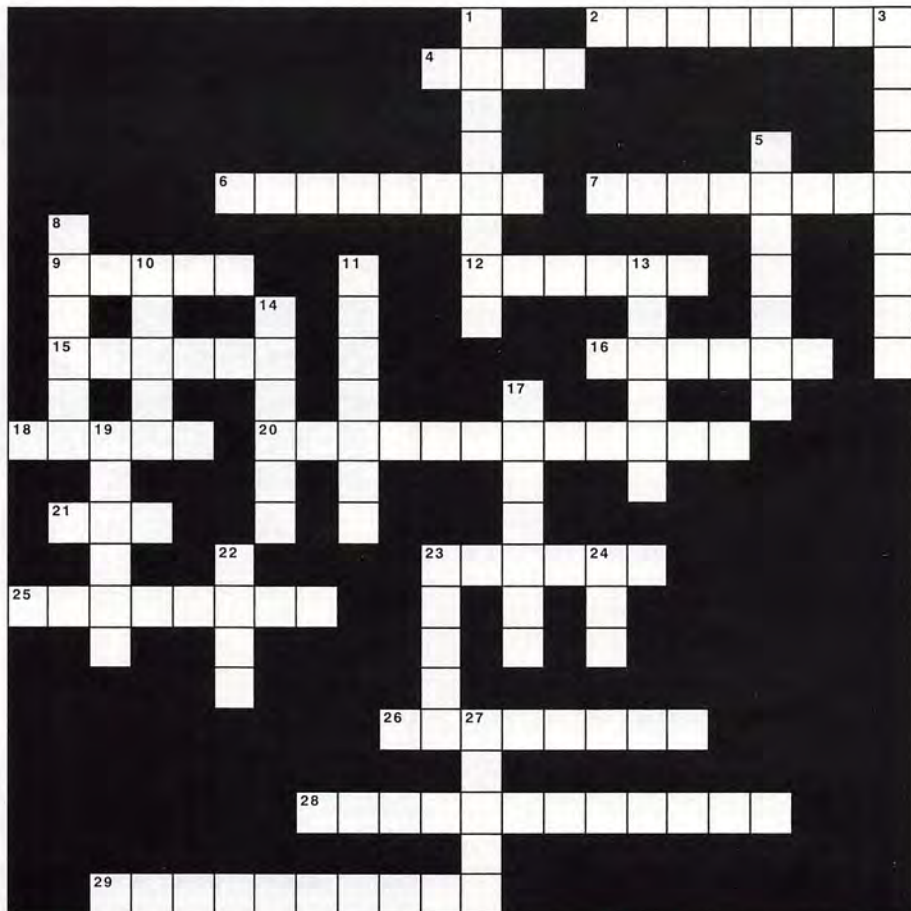
ACROSS

- 2 1995 national champion
- 4 Number of NU national championships
- 6 First road game in 2001
- 7 Frank Solich's alma mater
- 9 Number of 2001 home games
- 12 Quarterback missing spring drills
- 15 NU's No. 34
- 16 Defensive line coach
- 18 NU athletic director
- 20 Alamo Bowl opponent
- 21 2000 Spring Game result
- 23 NU's No. 77
- 25 2000 national champion
- 26 Tom Osborne's alma mater
- 28 Eric Crouch's alma mater
- 29 Secondary coach

DOWN

- 1 NU's No. 30
- 3 Leading rusher in Alamo Bowl
- 5 Leading receiver in Alamo Bowl
- 8 NU's No. 57
- 10 Ex-Husker running back with Packers
- 11 NU's No. 87
- 13 NU's No. 3 (defense)
- 14 Rush ends coach
- 17 Previous NU athletic director
- 19 NU center turning pro
- 22 Defensive coordinator
- 23 NU color commentator
- 24 Pigskin Classic opponent
- 27 NU play-by-play announcer

Answers in May issue



HUSKERNUTZ



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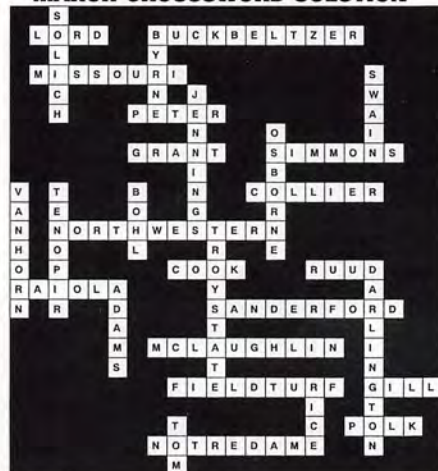
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NEB



Fast Forward

Elevating Nebraska baseball program didn't turn into a marathon



Mike BABCOCK

WHEN BILL BYRNE INTRODUCED Dave Van Horn as Nebraska's new baseball coach at a news conference in January of 1998, he said elevating the program would take some time.

"This is going to be more like a marathon," the Cornhusker athletic director said.

Van Horn, however, seems determined to turn the process into a sprint.

"To be honest with you, I thought if we could just move it up into the middle of the pack (in the Big 12) the first couple of three years that would be a great move," Van Horn said.

By his second season, he had accomplished that, directing Nebraska to a 42-18 record overall, including 16-9 in conference play — which was good enough for fifth place.

Then the Cornhuskers won the Big 12 Tournament, sweeping through without a loss, and advanced to an NCAA regional, in which they went 1-2, losing to Mississippi State twice.

Those who regarded 1999's success as an aberration were surprised again when Van Horn's third team recovered from an unimpressive start to finish second in the Big 12.

Nebraska was 21-9 in the regular season. And it won a second consecutive conference tournament, despite losing in the opening game of the double-elimination competition.

With that as the springboard, the Cornhuskers swept three NCAA regional games and won the first game of a best-of-three super regional at Stanford before bowing out at 51-17.

After that victory against Stanford, the majority of Nebraska baseball fans — and by then there were probably more than there have ever been — actually figured the Cornhuskers were headed to the College World Series. In just three seasons, Van Horn had turned them into believers.

Nebraska has never come as close as it did last season, not in the 50-plus years of the College World Series. The Cornhuskers had reached the NCAA regional level only three times, and been in district playoffs twice, prior to Van Horn's arrival from Northwestern State in Natchitoches, La.

And there was growing pessimism they might never get to Omaha until Byrne, with the endorsement of an acquaintance at Louisiana State, became interested in the 40-year-old Van Horn as the successor to John Sanders, who was fired after 20 years in charge of the program.

Nebraska has had only one other head baseball coach since 1947. Tony Sharpe was Sanders' predecessor, a continuity that underscored the gravity of Byrne's decision to make a change.

The process, however necessary it might have been, was hardly cut and dried.

Sanders had his greatest success early on, taking teams to NCAA regionals in 1979 and 1980 and again in 1985, when the Cornhuskers also were eliminated at Palo Alto, Calif.

The program fell on hard times in the late 1980s. Nebraska had a winning conference record only once during Sanders'

final 10 seasons, and it was just 7-23 in the first year of the Big 12, his last as coach. "There's a major difference between the Big Eight and the Big 12," Van Horn said.

Obviously, the addition of Texas, Texas A&M, Texas Tech and Baylor has made succeeding in conference play extremely difficult, much less succeeding at the national level. "If it was the Big Eight right now, we might be the team," said Van Horn. "We might be right there."

Given the back-to-back conference tournament championships, it's becoming difficult to convince Cornhusker fans that Nebraska isn't the team anyway, Texas schools or not.

Sanders, who now works in the Boston Red Sox minor league organization, knows baseball. And he's intensely competitive, a fact that made for an extremely acrimonious departure. But he seemed to lack the vision necessary for a collegiate program in a cold-weather climate to thrive.

Van Horn has that vision, as well as an infectious enthusiasm for the game.

"I thought that Nebraska should win 35 games every year, be able to get to 32, 35, 38," he has said. "You get higher than that and it's just a break here, having one more pitcher, one less injury."

"It's tough. There's a fine line, those last six or seven or eight games to make it an average season of 37 wins or a great season of 45. But it was definitely a thought that we could get back there."

Van Horn's vision and enthusiasm are tempered by realism. But he doesn't shy away from discussing the College World Series. "You have to talk about playing in the College World Series if you're going to get there," he said before the season. "They have to visualize it."

"And that's what they've done. I think that's our goal, as it is probably for 300 other Division I baseball teams. But realistically, we feel like we have a chance to get there."

"And there's maybe only 50 teams in the country that can say that."

A new home field, part of a \$32.1 million project, will enhance the possibilities.

The success has made things more difficult this season. The Cornhuskers were ranked in the Top 10 in the pre-season, as high as fourth. They're favorites to win the conference title.

Van Horn told the players before they went home last summer that "basically I feel like we have a big bull's eye on us now. Nobody's going to look past us anymore," he said.

His players are up to the challenge, as evidenced by a three-game sweep at Texas Tech to open conference play. "It's not very hard to keep this team hungry," Van Horn said prior to the season. "There are a lot of self-motivated guys. You don't have to tell them what to do. We've got seven or eight juniors that were our first true-freshman class that have been here through the whole process."

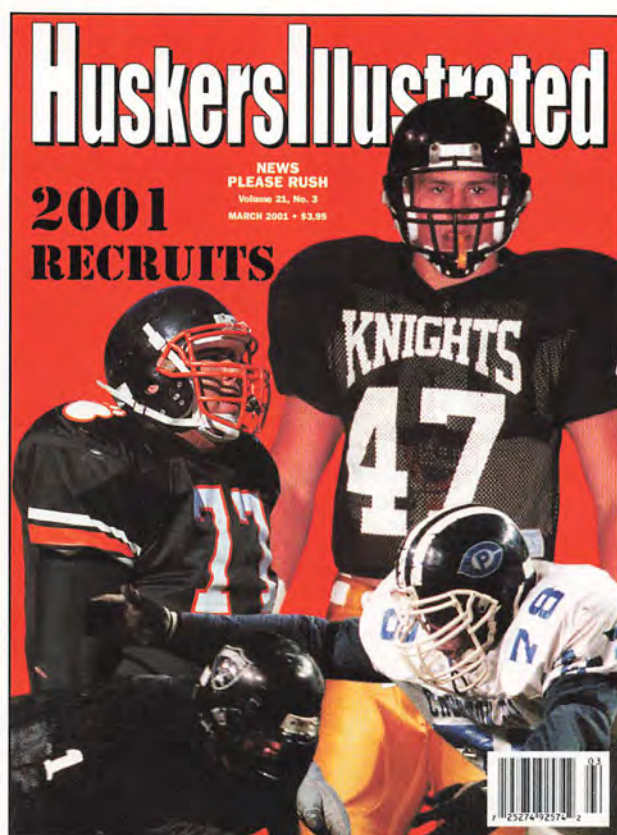
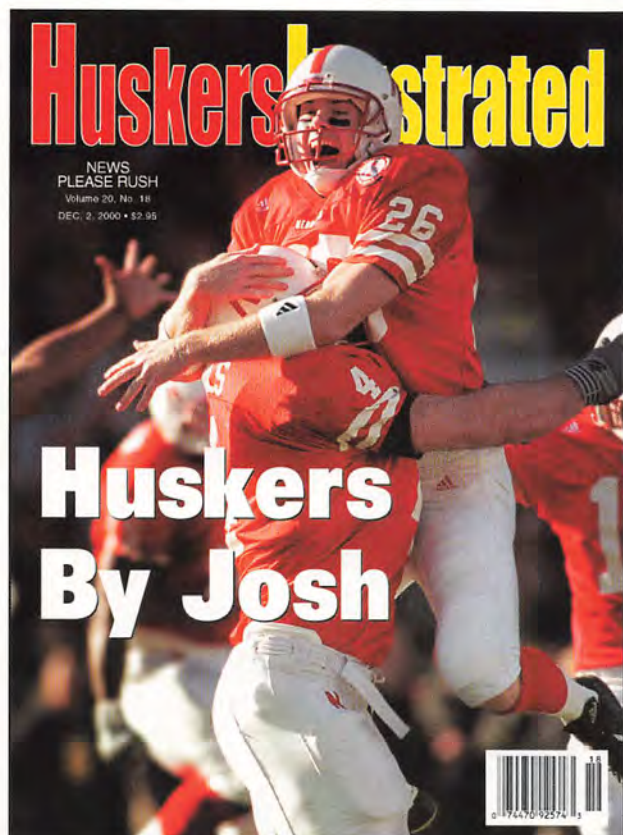
"And those guys are hungry. They want to play for a national championship."

He's able to say that after only three seasons, which hardly constitute a metaphorical marathon. ■



Dave Van Horn is in his fourth season at Nebraska.

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